Nature, Culture, Arts, & Design

COURSE DETAILS

Course Designator and Number: DES 3406
Number of Credits: 3
Instructor: Virajita Singh (she/her/hers), singh023@umn.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Iceland: Nature, Culture, Arts, & Design aims to offer a structured experience in which to learn about the Icelandic culture from afar through presentations, readings and digital media sources followed by direct experience through travel and a short immersion in the culture. Through interactions with people from the Icelandic culture while in Minnesota and then in Iceland, the course will involve rapid learning, reflection, and creative making, culminating in completion of academic work and a final presentation of the work to a cross-cultural audience.

The course will construct a woven experience, drawing from the “meshwork” ideas of social anthropologist Tim Ingold—Making: Anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture, Routledge, 2013—a book we will read during the course. This reading will build a framework for us alongside other readings. The human act of making creates knowledge, builds environments, and transforms lives, and anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture are all ways of making. In Making, Tim Ingold ties the four disciplines together. Instead of treating art and architecture as purely a collection of objects for anthropological or archaeological analysis, he advocates a way of thinking through making in which humans and materials answer to, or “correspond,” with one another in the generation of form.

The book also sheds light on what it means to create things, on materials and form, the meaning of design, landscape perception, animate life, personal knowledge, and the work of the hand. It draws on examples and experiments ranging from prehistoric stone tool-making to the building of medieval cathedrals, from round mounds to monuments, from flying kites to winding string, from drawing to writing. This text and the framework it provides is particularly important for us as we
consider Iceland and its culture, ancient and modern, because the processes that Ingold refers to are clearly apparent and will help us understand Iceland and its culture through the framework.

The course proposes the process of woven experience mentioned earlier in three ways. First, you will engage in Discovery of what constitutes an Icelandic experience using three lenses of Nature (Iceland has an unique, elemental landscape, with volcanoes, glaciers, geothermal springs, and mudpots, and the relationship between Icelanders, visitors, and this landscape is special), Culture (Iceland's Nordic history and tradition and language and storytelling including the Sagas are critical to understanding its culture), and Arts & Design (from ancient Nordic folk arts and crafts to modern and high design, remarkable examples of design sensibility and implementations abound in Iceland).

Second, you will participate in Engaging Partnerships. This course builds on the long-standing partnership between the University of Iceland and University of Minnesota as well as an ongoing partnership of the instructor with colleagues in the University of Iceland's School of Education on design thinking projects. We will be interacting with students and faculty from the University of Iceland and also with Iceland University of the Arts with possible interactions with the Icelandic Art Museum. We will explore these interactions in hybrid ways. The pandemic has both forced the virtual environment on us but also in turn opened new opportunities to connect to distant lands and cultural institutions via the virtual. We will use every opportunity that is available to us for learning in the course.

Third, you will engage in Learning through Making (drawing/writing/object making) as a means of observing, understanding, and connecting to your own experience, a pedagogical approach core to design disciplines where one draws, writes, or makes to understand a context, a people, a designed artifact as well as complex design problems. As you collect your experiences, reflecting on those experiences in conversations in visual journaling, through writing and making, and interpretation and meanings will be part of the course. As is usual with design disciplines, each student will be encouraged to explore their own identity and expression of ideas through the writing and creative output of the course. You will learn visual journaling and collaging and other creative techniques in this course.

**Course Objectives**

- To offer a foundational framework of how to think about place-based art, architecture, anthropology, and archaeology in connected ways through text and experiential learning
- To teach students how to understand a place through studying multidimensional aspects of a place
- To teach students how to learn from different sources—literary, visual, digital, experiential
- To teach students how to apply their learning and ideas through creative production and verbal expression, and presentation
Methodology

We will form a learning community focused on place-based learning about Iceland in preparation for actual travel to Iceland in May. Class meetings once a week will include short talks on a topic, discussion of readings, learning through making, guest speakers, and virtual conversations with faculty and students in Iceland.

Required Readings/Materials

General
- Melles, G., edited, Design Thinking in Higher Education: Interdisciplinary Encounters (Chapter 6: Singh V. *Design Thinking as an Anthropological Practice: Past/Present/Future*)
- Iceland [https://www.britannica.com/place/Iceland](https://www.britannica.com/place/Iceland)

Nature

Culture
- Icelandic Saga Database [https://sagadb.org](https://sagadb.org)

Arts & Design
- Sustainable Tourism in the North. Design in Nature, [https://natnorth.is/design-in-nordic-nature](https://natnorth.is/design-in-nordic-nature)
Grading

Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Score or percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93–100</td>
<td>Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90–92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87–89</td>
<td>Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83–86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80–82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77–79</td>
<td>Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73–76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70–72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67–69</td>
<td>Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60–66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0–59</td>
<td>Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Percentage of grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Readings and short assignments</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual journal</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final presentation</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall grade</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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COURSE CONTENT

Unit 1

Introduction
- Introduction to course
- Study abroad logistics
- Readings assigned

Unit 2

Discovery: Discussion of Readings (Nature)
- Discussion of readings
- Learning through Making: Intro to Visual Journaling
- Ingold, Ch.1
- Additional readings
- Journal assignment

Unit 3

Discovery: Discussion of Readings (Culture)
- Discussion of readings
- Learning through Making: Photography & Social Media
- Ingold, Ch.2
- Additional readings

Unit 4

Engaging Partnerships
- Virtual meeting with Icelandic colleagues and students
- Ingold, Ch. 3
- Additional readings
- Paper assignment

Unit 5

Discovery: Discussion of Readings (Arts & Design)
- Discussion of readings
• Learning through Making: Journal Development
• Ingold, Ch. 4
• Additional readings
• Virtual exhibit assignment

Unit 6

Discovery: Discussion of Readings (Nature)
• Discussion of readings
• Learning through Making: Guest Speaker
• Ingold, Ch.5
• Additional readings
• Paper draft

Unit 7

Spring Break

Unit 8

Discovery: Discussion of Readings (Culture)
• Discussion of readings
• Learning through Making: Journal Development
• Ingold, Ch.6
• Additional readings

Unit 9

Engaging Partnerships
• Virtual meeting with Icelandic colleagues and students
• Ingold, Ch. 7
• Additional readings
• Virtual exhibit draft 2

Unit 10

Discovery: Discussion of Readings (Arts & Design)
• Discussion of readings
• Learning through Making: Journal Development
Unit 11

Discovery & Learning through Making
- Learning through Making: Journal Development
- Virtual exhibit development
- Ingold, Ch.9
- Additional readings

Unit 12

Discovery & Learning through Making
- Learning through Making: Journal Development
- Readings
- Paper draft 2

Unit 13

Engaging Partnerships
- Virtual meeting with Icelandic colleagues and students
- Readings
- Virtual exhibit draft 3

Unit 14

Discovery: Discussion of Readings (Arts & Design)
- Discussion of readings
- Learning through Making: Journal Development
- Paper readings in class
- Readings
- Paper draft 3
Unit 15
Prep for Travel (No Class)

Unit 16
Prep for Travel (No Class)

Unit 17
Discovery through Travel
  ● Engaging partnerships in person
  ● Learning through Making: Journal Development
  ● Travel immersion
  ● Final paper due
  ● Final journal due for grading

Unit 18
Virtual Exhibit
  ● June 2022 (tentative)

POLICIES

Attendance Policy
Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures
Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:
Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an “F” or “N” for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found on the Learning Abroad Center website.