

Maltese Islands and Tunis- Fall Semester 2002 Academic Travel Syllabus

Complex learning often cannot be adequately measured through traditional paper-and pencil tests. Higher-level objectives performed in authentic contexts need special evaluation techniques. Therefore, schools are turning to alternative assessment methods that allow educators and students to evaluate process as well as product. Before educators can ask students to use journals, self-assessment, peer conferences, portfolios, observations, and so forth, they must first model these techniques themselves. Instructors can use the following simple ideas when working with students to develop a syllabus for academic travel programs:

1. Have students keep reflective journals. Students can respond to topics read outside class or to problems found in field experiences. Journals can be kept confidential, or presented to instructors or peers for reaction. Instructors should emphasize the content of entries rather than language mechanics. They may allow students to choose topics freely or they may guide them with open-ended questions.

2. Use observations accompanied by checklists or rubrics to assess student performance. Obviously, field experiences lend themselves to this method, but it also may be used as students teach lessons to each other, demonstrate business or cultural concepts, give presentations, participate in-group work, and so forth. Using student feedback, instructors can model how they develop these instruments. Students also should be allowed to assess their instructors with similar instruments.

3. Give numerous opportunities for self-evaluation. Students need to learn to evaluate themselves independently so that they can continue to grow professionally. This may be done through open-ended questions, journal entries, checklists, or rubrics. Self-assessment can be particularly beneficial with the same instruments that instructors will use during field experiences. Instructors should not penalize students when their appraisal of their own performance is different from the instructor's; however, they should investigate why there are discrepancies.

4. Peer evaluation is often helpful. Peers are often empathetic, and their comments and suggestions can be right on target. However, they must learn to phrase their advice or criticism constructively. Instructors should model this approach and directly teach peers how to be unbiased and fair.

5. Don't forget anecdotal records. These may be used to evaluate students' personal and social development as young, mature adults, as well as learning outcomes. Because anecdotal records are time-consuming, instructors should use them for behaviors that are not easily assessed by other means. Often, an anecdotal section may be added to a checklist or rubric.

6. Conduct student interviews. Interviews may be used for students to explain subject matter (e.g., Piaget's conservation stages with concrete aids), describe how they would handle difficult hypothetical situations (e.g., a student with a short attention span, inappropriate behavior of a student), and so forth. Allow students to prepare for the interview by letting them know about the topic and procedures of the interview in advance.

7. Travel wrap-up conferences are more of a reciprocal meeting. Instructors should plan topics to discuss, and let students know them ahead of time. Students also should feel free to bring up additional subjects, however. Suggestions for improvement generated by the conference should be agreed upon by both instructors and students. Instructors should ask students, "How can I help you be a better student?" Also, students should ask travel leaders, "How can we help you be a better travel leader?"

8. Portfolios show progress over time. They are often made up of students' best work rather than all of the activities that students have experienced on academic travel. Be aware that the making of portfolios requires intensive effort and many hours of work. Students should not be required to compile more than one portfolio.

The above ideas are not meant to be exhaustive; they are simply a place for instructors to start in preparation of a syllabus. Keep in mind that instructors should make it clear to students how the

above techniques are directly measuring the objectives taught during an academic travel trip and when each technique is most appropriate.