Proposal submitted for Indiana University’s Curriculum Development Grant
November 2011

Proposal Narrative

a) What is the project intended to accomplish?

This proposal requests summer funding to develop a new course that is tentatively entitled “Contemporary U.S. Immigration: Negotiating Identity and Community.” This course will be offered in two different versions: As a 400-level seminar through the Women’s and Gender Studies Program (WGS) and as a social science elective in the Master of Liberal Studies Program (MLS). This course has not been previously taught at either level, nor have I ever taught a graduate seminar. My proposed course would address several needs for both programs. These program needs can be summarized as follows:

1. Women’s and Gender Studies

   As part of our curriculum, WGS majors are required to take a 400-level seminar that allows them to engage in an interdisciplinary, in-depth analysis of the dynamic relationship between gender, race and class. I believe that a seminar that focuses on issues of immigration as well as identity and community building is ideally suited to meet this need. The curriculum development grant (CDG) would enable me to develop an interdisciplinary course schedule that examines how different immigrant groups re-shape communities and how the immigration experience alters their own gender, racial and class identity. This course will focus on voluntary migration and refugee movements and the effect that contemporary immigrants have had on U.S. culture, politics, and society. A special emphasis will be placed on our local community and our own campus.

   Since I started teaching at IUSB three years ago, I have offered only one senior level seminar in WGS. While the general topic – immigration – might appear similar to this newly proposed course, the focus was substantially different: The previous seminar offered a much more general look at the history of migration to the U.S. and the challenges immigrants face (e.g. transnational motherhood, family reunification and difficulties within the U.S. labor market). There was no specific focus on immigrants’ changing identities or community building.

   The course that I am proposing will be much more specialized and address an aspect that is of particular interest to our students. Namely, this newly proposed course will focus on
micro-level developments and how immigration has affected (and will continue to affect) our own communities, neighborhoods, and schools. While much scholarship on immigration continues to examine the main immigrant receiving states such as Texas and California and urban areas (e.g. New York City), there is a growing body of research that investigates the impact immigration has had on rural areas and states that are further away from the U.S-Mexico border. The CDG would enable me to familiarize myself with this new body of research and develop an essentially new class that focuses much more specifically on community and identity building in the Midwest in general and our local community in particular.

To help students understand local developments, I would like to use this summer grant to establish relationships with local immigrant organizations (e.g. La Casa de Amistad and the Red Cross of St. Joseph County and their Refugee Resettlement Program) and organizations that assist international students on our campus. The course that I envision would combine experiential learning, research and service learning. The partnership with local organizations would go beyond bringing guest speakers into the classroom – even though this would undoubtedly be an important contribution. In addition, I would like to enhance students’ civic responsibility and critical thinking skills by providing them with opportunities to work with local organizations that serve our immigrant communities. Making these local connections would not only benefit our students in the classroom, but it would also be useful to them with an eye on future opportunities for a practicum (another required component of our major).

Making connections between my students and international students on our campus would also be an important component of my proposed course. One great resource in this context is Connie Peterson Miller, the Director of International Student Services. I am also currently serving on the International Student Housing and Services Advisory Board here at IUSB. In cooperation with the Director of Housing and Residence Life, Paul Krikau, I would like to explore how we could establish relationships between my classroom and the newly created “Bridge International Theme House.” This connection would involve programming collaborations as well as integrating international students’ experiences into my course schedule. This partnership would improve the learning experience in my class by providing students with first person narratives of migrating to a foreign country, moving to South Bend, fitting in with new peers and developing a new sense of identity and community on our campus. In addition, this collaboration would help international students feel welcome, make new – and hopefully lasting – connections with their U.S. citizen peers and give them an opportunity to share their stories.

2. Master of Liberal Studies

A graduate-level course on immigrant communities and identities would be well suited to serve as a Social Science Elective (LBST-D 512). My own background in American Culture Studies with an emphasis in Ethnicity, Gender, and Social Identities has prepared me well to teach an interdisciplinary social science course. However, I have not yet the opportunity to teach a graduate level course. The CDG would allow me to develop distinct graduate learning outcomes and assignments that meet the needs of our MLS students.

My proposed course would allow MLS students to gain a fresh perspective on immigration and further develop their critical thinking, analytical and communication skills and prepare them for a global workplace.
b) What activities/methods are planned to obtain the project's objective?

The proposed activities are twofold: First, I will familiarize myself with recent publications in the field and select readings for the new emphasis on identity and community building in immigrant communities. Additional readings would have a special focus on local developments and Midwestern immigrant communities more generally.

Secondly, I would spend time working with local organizations and the aforementioned offices on our campus. I would like to explore various options for experiential learning and getting our students involved with community organizations and making connections with international students at IUSB. This emphasis on experiential learning and community connections would further the strategic goals on our campus.

c) What qualifications do you bring to the position as grant director?

My own research focuses on contemporary immigration, with a specific focus on the 1990s. I am currently completing revisions on a book manuscript on neoliberal immigration reform discourses. I have also presented at regional and national conferences on different aspects of immigration (incl. media representations of immigrant mothers and current efforts to pass the DREAM Act, which would give undocumented students access to higher education and job opportunities). However, one of the gaps in my current research involves local developments. Much of my time has been spent analyzing national discourses and reform efforts and I am fairly unfamiliar with immigrant-related concerns in South Bend and in the Midwest more generally. The CDG would allow me to spend a summer learning more about local immigrant communities and immigrant-specific organizations. Hopefully, these connections would not only allow me to develop interesting and engaging classes for both undergraduate WGS majors and MLS students, but it would also be extremely useful with an eye on future research projects.

d) What previous grants have you received and what resulted from those projects?

I received a Faculty Development Grant in the summer of 2009. The FRG enabled me to research recent developments in immigration law and collect the data necessary to revise and update my book manuscript. I am currently finishing the second (and hopefully last) set of revisions. My manuscript is under contract with the University of Minnesota Press and is scheduled to appear in print in Spring of 2013. I have never received a Curriculum Development Grant.

4. Budget

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