Hello Ray:

Thanks for the feedback on my syllabus. I'm attempting to address the issue that you raised (i.e., providing more information to you about the homestays and other cross-cultural interactions), but this is not an easy task at this stage of development in our Mayterm planning. My preference would be to NOT make any changes to the GE Submission form or syllabus, but rather to indicate to the committee that the itinerary is an attachment and should be referenced for information regarding the cultural embeddedness of the trip. At this point, we simply don't have the details.

I feel confident in predicting that we will spend at least 7 or 8 nights with families and groups in Bethlehem (my friend and former student John Morgenstern pastors a house church there, and has agreed to bring us into their home for a few days. In the past, Bruce has used Bedouin camps for home stays, and we plan to use these again as well. These stays are more aimed at Palestinian/Arab groups. We are also pursuing opportunities for stays with Jewish communities, and (we hope) with Zionist Jews and Christians as well.

The homestays are, however, only a small portion of what makes this trip a cross-cultural experience. Bruce's '07 trip was (as he says) "close to the ground" -- they made use of local transportation, stayed in "backpackers" accommodations and other inexpensive places, and ate in small, local establishments. In short, the entire trip is designed to immerse our students in the culture of Israel, Palestine, and their Arab neighbors at every point possible. This is not a trip in which Western students stay in Western accommodations, eat Western food, talk to Westerners, and have the occasional tourist experience with a Western guide.

In short, I am asking the committee to look at the Gestalt of our trip, and not try to micromanage (or microscopically analyze) the details. Perhaps this is a philosophical difference between myself and the makeup of the present committee (or with you). I don't think the committee should ever take a professors word that "we'll do what's necessary to meet the requirements." However, I do think unless the GE requirements call for a specific quantification of details (e.g., as with the writing intensive courses), qualitative descriptions and general categories of experience and assignment should suffice.

The other aspect to which I would like to draw the committee's attention is that content nature of the PSY-150 course. The cultural/narrative emphasis requires not only reflection on concepts of narratively constructed self and culture, but also reflection on real narratives and cultural experiences. As we briefly describe in the syllabi and itinerary, students will meet formally with a wide variety of speakers and informally with shopkeepers, restaurant workers, refugees and others. The trip is designed to maximize these experiences.

Would you mind forwarding this information to the GE Committee along with the syllabi and supporting documents? Of course, if your sense is that this will be rejected and that the syllabus needs substantially more detail regarding these experiences, please let me know. At this point, however, I'm not sure how I could make those arrangements before we need to begin advertising.

Thanks,
-tom