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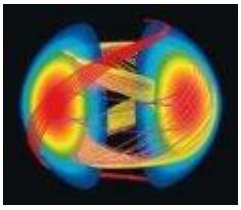
Interdisciplinary Prospects in Global Studies

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For a scholar like myself, who in terms of traditional field demarcations would most likely be classified as a comparative political economist, the opportunities for a first-time tenure-track position can be found in more than one field. One can apply for attractive positions in a few economics departments, schools of public policy,

schools of public and/or international affairs, and naturally, political science departments interested in scholars of international relations, comparative politics, political economy, or any combination of the three. The most appealing, however, are the programs in Global Studies. What sets these programs apart is their commitment to research and practice that transcend disciplines and their preferred methods of analysis. Moreover, they pledge to pursue a much needed comprehensive understanding of the increasingly interconnected world that we inhabit, as well as the challenges we must address as its global citizens.

The allure of a Global Studies program for a future professorial career lies in its promise to encourage and reward truly entrepreneurial and interdisciplinary scholarship. In line with Schumpeter's conception of an entrepreneur as an innovator, Global Studies scholars are challenged to "carry out new combinations" in the crowded academic "markets" by introducing new research questions that demand alternative theories and new methods (or that employ existing tools in new directions) in order to offer alternative structures for the production of knowledge. According to Ronald Burt, such entrepreneurs are individuals who can broker across the structural holes that exist between bodies of ideas. While the ideas and opinions are likely to be homogeneous within groups, individuals who are connected to multiple groups across structural holes offer alternative and innovative points of view or, as Burt put it, "good ideas." Global Studies programs, it seems, wish to capitalize on these ideas by bringing together scholars that are breaking away from the confines or loyalties of their respective disciplines, motivated solely by the thematic goals of understanding the needs and challenges of an integrated world society.



Global studies programs, more than any other program, seem poised to address significant lacunae in international and comparative political economy teaching. While issues of development feature prominently in today's classrooms, much of the discourse is grounded in state-centered approaches that focus their attention on state structures, political processes, policy choices and political boundaries. Recently published reviews of the state of teaching in international and comparative political economy explain that these trends are largely a result of the dominance of political

science over what should essentially be inter-disciplinary analytical questions. Not only does this imply that the debates between liberalism and realism dominate teaching at the expense of structural and critical approaches, but topics such as global inequality, poverty, migration and environmental concerns are not receiving adequate attention.

Global Studies programs can specifically compensate for these disadvantages by centering the teaching of international and comparative political economy on the issues of interdependence and globalization as processes that impact, and are conditioned by, the world society. This would address the already existing demand for giving "due attention to agents and processes less mediated through formal institutions." Moreover, it would enable the discussion of topics that are disturbingly rare in international political economy courses such as the interaction between globalization and global health, the technological divide, the enforcement of intellectual property rights, and the impact of emigration and brain drain on underdevelopment, among others. A huge intellectual void that Global Studies promises to fill is the study of the relationship between global economic forces on the one hand and culture, religion and civilizations on the other. Adopting the focus on the world society as the unit of analysis, as opposed to the state-centered approaches, allows Global Studies to examine the role of civilizations in economic globalization, and, vice-versa, the impact of global pressures on the cultural and religious elements characterizing the world's civilizations. In addressing these pressing issues largely ignored by international and comparative political economy, Global Studies can bring other disciplines "back to the table" by inviting practitioners, anthropologists, ecologists, sociologists, and legal scholars to join the ranks of political scientists and economists in the endeavor. It is up to Global Studies to espouse a truly transdisciplinary inquiry once promised, and only partially delivered, by international political economy scholarship.

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To go beyond a program that brings multiple disciplines together, Global Studies must adequately attend to its methods curricula. Political economy programs that encourage students to take courses both in quantitative and qualitative analysis

have certainly taken a step in the right direction by exposing their students to two critically important families of methods employed in social science research. However, these multi-method approaches are not free from pitfalls. Within each of the method "camps" students are still pigeonholed into using only select tools, especially with respect to quantitative methods. It would be a great disservice to students in Global Studies to require them to complete a course in econometric techniques, for example, when their research interests lie in topics that are better approached with tools of factor or principal component analyses. Students would gain more if they were offered a survey course of applied multivariate techniques, for example, structured in a way similar to the statistics courses popular in professional, public policy and business programs. A similar overview of qualitative methods for analysis and data collection would also be necessary to illustrate, for example, the profound difference between case study methods, ethnography and discourse analysis. Global Studies programs should provide the students with an opportunity to grasp the vast array of research methods and options for exploring alternative combinations of existing methods. At the same time, students should be made aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the various methods so that they can intelligently and effectively choose the most appropriate methods for their inquiries. An argument can be made that such survey courses would not adequately prepare students to employ any one specific technique, thus leaving them without the tools they may require for future careers. Unfortunately, neither is a semester long course in a specific method sufficient for students wishing to conduct a research project. For the interdisciplinary problems to which Global Studies is committed, providing students with a "taste" of methods they can access would ensure that they adopt methods that best suit their research objectives. To guarantee the discourse is driven by real world problems and research questions, and not methodological puzzles and considerations, students must be provided with an overview of the multiple research techniques available and must be encouraged to acquire more specialized training in the methods they find most appropriate. Moreover, familiarity with numerous research techniques ensures that future scholars and practitioners in Global Studies will be able to engage with each other's work. Too often scholars from international relations and economics, working on similar problems, talk past each other because the methods employed do not translate across the disciplinary divide. Understanding the type of inquiry adopted in research across the Global Studies field will ensure that the scholars brought together to examine the challenges encountered by the world society can speak to each other without sacrificing scientific rigor.

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For a scholar whose research interests simultaneously engage multiple disciplines, analytical approaches and research techniques, and who wishes to examine the dynamic processes in the world society, Global Studies programs provide an attractive option for an academic "home." Observing Global Studies programs from the outside, it seems that behind the doors one can find stimulating research environments that promote innovative approaches that are not necessarily determined by traditional disciplinary loyalties. Not only do they encourage cooperative work among a multitude of scholars, from multiple disciplines, brought together by the nature of their research topics, but they seem to be particularly capable of overcoming present teaching deficiencies in international and comparative political economy. Successfully addressing the problems with methods training in multi- and inter-disciplinary approaches would elevate Global Studies above and beyond similar programs within existing disciplines. Naturally, the concerns over methods curricula and the training that should be provided will be in part determined through the considerations of the student body that the program wishes to recruit, and the levels of academic programs that are offered.

Notes

1 Schumpeter saw the entrepreneur as an agent of innovation, which essentially entails the "new combinations of productive means." These combinations can take one of five different forms: 1) introduction of a new good; 2) introduction of a new method of production; 3) access to a new market previously unavailable to that particular country or industry; 4) acquiring a new source of supply; and 5) producing a change in the industry's organization. Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1983. (orig. 1911). The Theory of Economic Development. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

2 Burt, Ronald. 2004. Structural Holes and Good Ideas. American Journal of Sociology 110 (3): 349-99.

3 White, Gregory W. 2007. International Political Economy and the Persistent Scare Quotes around "Development". Perspectives on Politics 5 (1): 105-113. Paul, Darel E. 2006. Teaching Political Economy in Political Science: A Review of International and Comparative Political Economy Syllabi. Perspectives on Politics 4 (4): 729-734.

4 Paul 2006, 732.

5 White 2007.

Tags

global studies

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interdisciplinarity



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