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Creating the Global Studies Curriculum – A Space for the Local?

July 13, 2009 | Volume 3 | Issue 6
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In Fall 2006, Lehigh University created an undergraduate major in Global Studies. In this essay, I examine theoretical, methodological and pedagogical approaches ultimately chosen for the new curriculum. In particular, I consider our attempt to emphasize *the local* in our global study.[1] [1]

Discrete research and teaching on global topics had gone at Lehigh for more than a century. However, the attacks of 9-11-01, just 90 minutes from our university, galvanized faculty and students to more fully internationalize Lehigh's campus. Faculty took on the role of globalizing research and teaching.

One of our first theoretical and pedagogical decisions: Out of the many ways in which a university might internationalize curriculum and research, we decided to focus on *globalization*.

A number of factors lay behind the choice. One was focus. In some Global Studies programs, students choose from an array of courses, sometimes hundreds, tied together only by virtue of international content and concern. *Globalization* gave us a subject of study for teaching and research.

Another factor was the importance of the subject: No matter how it is defined – and we have some faculty who deny its existence – globalization must be considered one of the defining terms of modern life.

A third factor was its interdisciplinary potential: We have four colleges – 18 departments in the College of Arts and Sciences alone – and yet each discipline was engaged in studies that took up globalization.

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In Spring 2006, we submitted a proposal to create the Globalization and Social Change Initiative. It was immediately accepted – and funded. I had headed one of the working groups and was asked to be director of the Initiative. By Fall 2006, we were up and running.

I should explain what is meant at Lehigh by an "Initiative." The concept, at one level, is similar to a research institute or center. Primary functions of the Initiative are to foster and promote faculty research.

Yet at Lehigh, and other campuses, research institutes do not get involved with the

undergraduate curriculum, nor do they sponsor extracurricular student clubs and activities.

The concept of an Initiative allows us to support almost any activity on campus that falls under the rubric of globalization and social change. We do traditional center activities, such as hosting research symposia and conferences. But we also created the undergraduate Global Studies major and plan a graduate degree in Global Studies. Too, we sponsor international student clubs and activities. The breadth is rich and satisfying.

Why an initiative in "*globalization and social change*?" Again, theoretical and pedagogical considerations guided us.

Globalization, we felt strongly, is not simply an economic process. This was important for us to emphasize as we worked alongside our colleagues from the business college.

We believe that globalization, while surely an economic process, is also historical, social, religious, cultural and political. *Globalization and social change*, we felt, signified our scope.



With our understanding of globalization and social change in place, we set out to situate that understanding within the curriculum. Like many programs, we felt that a primary strength of Global Studies is its interdisciplinary nature. We tried to create a markedly interdisciplinary curriculum (and courses).

An introductory course presents students with competing notions of globalization and then proceeds through modules, each showcasing how the study of globalization is undertaken in different disciplines: history, political economy, culture and anthropology, political science and international relations, communication, sociology and others.

Students then work their way through a core curriculum made up of course work from more than eight different departments, courses specifically tailored for the major: globalization and history; the political economy of globalization; culture and globalization; politics and globalization, global communication, globalization and religion, and more. Advanced electives and a capstone research seminar round out the curriculum.

However, the Global Studies curriculum is only one part of the major. Following the work of Appadurai (1996), Pieterse (2004), and others, we felt that globalization is fruitfully studied at the local level – “the global production of locality” (Appadurai, 1996, 188). We debated how to give our students experience and tools for understanding the ways globalization is negotiated within local contexts.

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As a start, we require intermediate language proficiency of our students, the equivalent of four semesters. We encourage – and gave serious consideration to requiring – a major in a foreign language but ultimately felt the credit requirements for a double major would be too intense. But language is a tool for understanding and we wanted our students to at least experience language instruction, to understand the connection between language and culture, and to know that the world does not speak English.

We also require two courses in one Area Studies program (and strongly encourage at least a minor), such as Asian Studies, Latin American Studies, and others. Like Appadurai, we felt that Area Studies, though contested, still provide “a *site* for the examination of how locality emerges in a globalizing world” (18).

Finally, we require Study Abroad, either a full semester or two six-week summer sessions. We believe that immersion in another culture is essential for our students’ education. We help students seek out service learning projects while abroad.

With good advising, students match language, Area Studies and Study Abroad. For example, a Global Studies student studying Spanish will take Latin American Studies classes, and study and work in Chile. We encourage students, while abroad, to pursue the intersections of the global and local, of “how global facts take local form” (Appadurai, 18).

The program – the Global Studies curriculum with the localizing experiences of language instruction, area studies, and study abroad – is in its infancy. Still to be determined: What are the educational – and life – outcomes of this particular balance of global and local in study of globalization?

Versions of this essay were presented to the Global Studies Conference, Chicago, Illinois, May 2008, and the Global Studies Association North America Annual Conference, New York, New York, June 2008.

Notes

Appadurai, Arjun (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*.

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Pieterse, Jan Nederveen (2004). *Globalization and Culture: Global Melange*.

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