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The Disciplined Undiscipline of Global Studies

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It is clear that global studies is not a discipline but a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary area of study, that is, the world in its diversity and complexity. The very reason why our focus has evolved into global studies is that no single discipline, or even combination of disciplines, does justice to understanding the world, human

cultures, or global issues. Hence from understanding globalization, to the claims of new kinds of world orders, to global terrorism, the current Iraq war, or the Bollywood vs. Hollywood global cultures, disciplines left us with very unsatisfactory answers. In terms of understanding the Iraq war, for instance, political science, economics, and anthropology all fall short of providing this understanding because of global religion, social movements, global culture, and hegemonic forces all colliding. This multiplicity of factors is too complex for any one of these disciplines to effectively analyze.

Similarly, as my colleague at Winona State University and the long-time director of our program, Dr. Yogesh Grover, often observes, geographically as well as academically, the global studies unit of analysis is larger and more comprehensive that what is studied by the disciplines. The primary unit of analysis in global studies is the global as opposed to the regional, the national, or the local units of analyses employed by various disciplinary approaches. This provides another crucial example of not only how different global studies is compared to other disciplines, but also how unique and vital the perspective it offers is to understanding our world.

At the same time religious studies, the humanities, and the sciences have their own weaknesses, often failing to analyze the political and economic power of oil and other vital resources, of superpower foreign policy, as well as the accompanying economic and political dimensions of hatred and violence. However they each can bring important, unique insights that supplement narrower international-relations analyses in understanding the current situation in Iraq, for example.

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The term discipline in its English usage reveals a narrow, concentrated focus that can never be that of global studies. At the same time global studies requires application of another meaning of discipline - rigor and seriousness - as it seeks to understand the world through multiple perspectives (that is, the first meaning of discipline) and at times through a holistic integrated, interdisciplinary lens.

"A community of learners dedicated to improving our world" constitutes the popular shortened version of our mission statement at Winona State University. This year in

particular the global studies program will be emphasizing not only that it is impossible to understand the world in an exclusively multidisciplinary way, but especially that it is impossible to improve the world without understanding it. And this has wide ranging applications all the way from the Iraq war to globalization and including religious evangelization, climate change, terrorism, poverty, overpopulation, and development. Lots of efforts to improve our world have had ineffective or, worse, disastrous results because of a lack of a thorough understanding of the world or its parts. A case in point is the current Iraq war and American-Iranian relations, but also within the area of culture. Look at the effect of the American and international media successfully meddling in the broadcast of soccer games to first interject commercials into what had been a free-flowing game composed of two halves and secondly insisting on immediate results through the imposition of a shoot-out, thus forever altering this final segment of the game from what had been a team sport to an individual contest.

Many of our students deserve credit for choosing a global studies major based upon their interest in diverse human cultures, global issues, and the increasing internationalization of many careers. Unlike many global studies programs, one of the principal founders of our program was an American English professor who grew up in Japan. Thus there remain humanities connections to our program. This also matches up very nicely with the overwhelming number of students whose primary focus and interest is in the study of world cultures, particularly since we do not have an anthropology program.

While we are proud of the interest our students take in understanding culture globally, I also caution them that regardless of their global interests, a good understanding of the global environment, global conflict, and the global economy and globalization is essential. I advise even my most humanities-focused students that they would benefit enormously by studying the global economy in particular. Hence this is where it is necessary to interject the idea of discipline to students' ongoing study of the world.

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Our majors must take courses within two areas of study: global perspectives and regional perspectives. The former is made up of courses within four subcategories:

the global environment, global governance, global society and culture, and the global economy. Not only does this multidisciplinary approach lead to the students' understanding the current system and process of globalization more completely, it also provides the students with a better understanding of how our world is organized both in terms of parts and as a whole.

The regional perspectives area of study allows students the opportunity to study one part of the world in depth including language requirements and study abroad possibilities. Currently Asian, European, Latin American, and North American concentrations are possible.

Such a curriculum makes it possible for a student to both understand the different aspects of globalization and the global system as well as to gain a more complete understanding of one part of the world. The latter also enhances the former in terms of gaining important insights about global functions through coming to observe and understand how these work in one region of the world.

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