

## **In the Classroom and Beyond: Expanding international experience past regular mobility**

Chris Dolan

Lebanon Valley College, USA

### **Abstract**

This essay uses a case study approach in detailing programmatic changes recently made to the Lebanon Valley College (LVC) International Studies program. We believe our newly revised program (renamed Global Studies) is innovative given its integration with efforts to internationalize the campus and focus on high impact learning experiences, namely study abroad, collaborative undergraduate research, internship opportunities, community-engaged learning, and a global independent research experience. The program might serve as a model for other colleges and universities that value graduating world-ready students and internationalizing their campuses. The overall goal of this study is to highlight the inclusion of deeper learning experiences and stronger alignment with college-wide international goals.

### **Introduction**

Colleges and universities struggle to keep up with trends in international education and new ways of approaching internationalization. Lebanon Valley College (LVC) recently approved the conversion of its international studies program into global studies as part of an effort to modernize the major and minor and expand high impact learning opportunities for students. The international studies program required students to complete a study abroad experience, participate in collaborative undergraduate research or an internship, take advanced-level language, and choose a general thematic concentration in either international economics/politics or global society/culture. However, assessments indicated there were better ways of connecting the classroom with a wider array of learning experiences that take place well beyond it and to more effectively link the program to new college-wide strategic goals of internationalizing the campus and graduating world-ready students.

Assessment reports of the original program revealed that improvements could be made to benefit student learning experiences. First, given that the college was advancing a new vision statement and strategic plan emphasizing the development of skills necessary to compete and contribute in the world with more globalized curricular and co-curricular experiences, recruitment of international students, more high impacting programs, and stronger global career development options, we sought to realign the program with broader campus internationalization goals. Second, given the presence of two distinct concentrations (politics/economic and culture), majors and minors were not being exposed to all content areas in the program. For example, students in international

economics/politics were not being adequately exposed to global socio-cultural issues, concepts, and theories and students in global society/culture were not being exposed to economics, trade and finance, or global politics and international relations theory. In other words, the two concentrations were resulting in a degree of specialization that was counterproductive to the interdisciplinary nature of the major. Third, beyond the study abroad requirement, assessments demonstrated there were not enough high impact experiences available for majors. The previous program only provided one of two options for students: collaborative undergraduate research and internships. Fourth, students were also not developing adequate information literacy skills since the previous program did not require the students to complete a course in research methods, since the research methods course in the previous program was optional for majors. As a result, students were not being exposed to the full range of methods appropriate for conducting research in the discipline.

We responded to the call for a more international campus by aligning the program with new strategic global priorities of the college and the need to address curricular weaknesses by eliminating the two general concentrations, changing the program name from “International Studies” to “Global Studies,” including more high impact experiences, and integrating classroom with more beyond the classroom experiences. Every major must now take courses in global politics, economics, and intercultural cultural diversity, inquiry-based research methods, select three beyond the classroom experiences, and complete a community-engaged learning project in addition to pursuing study abroad and foreign language and are expected to play an integral part in furthering campus internationalization initiatives. The overall intention is for students to engage in a more unified intellectual experience with the potential to learn together as a cohesive global learning community from convocation to commencement and beyond.

### **Campus Internationalization**

Developing strong global programming is central to the identity of any institution that values inclusion, intercultural awareness, and preparing world-ready students (Crichton & Scarino, 2007; Deardorff, 2006; Stier, 2006). Most colleges will enhance study abroad opportunities, foreign language study, and design globally-themed courses in major and general education programs (Dolan, 2011). However, revisions made to the LVC Global Studies program sought to do much more by serving as a vehicle for internationalizing the campus and expanding student learning beyond the classroom.

Internationalization of the LVC campus was recently made a top priority in the LVC 2014-2015 strategic planning process. The college envisions our graduates acquiring competencies, experiences, and skills to compete and thrive on a global scale premised on commitments to diversity-initiatives, enrollment of international students, study abroad, and other high impact opportunities. Global Studies is central to these goals given that students in the program help recruit and retain international students, cultivate broader student interest in study abroad, engage in both curricular and co-curricular experiences, seek out internships which emphasize global-local connections, and participate in community-engaged learning experiences.

Global Studies students are very active in internationalizing all aspects of the LVC campus, especially helping to attract and retain international students. Following the transformation of International Studies into Global Studies, an informal "global ambassadors" initiative was formed that allows majors to work with the enrollment office to host international students visiting the campus. Students interact with potential international students by explaining and answering questions about college academic programs, student activities, residential life, and career opportunities (Hanover Research, 2010). The Global Studies program also partnered with the Center for Global Education, an administrative office at the nexus of academic affairs and student life that coordinates study abroad programs and LVC's international students, for outreach to students from both the U.S. and abroad.

As "global ambassadors," majors work closely with the offices of Global Education, multicultural affairs, enrollment, and residential life to coordinate student life programming for both U.S. and international students. Students participate in mentorship initiatives to address culture shock and other challenges in adapting to campuses and establishing friendships. The most significant challenges include mentoring new students adjusting to different classroom behaviors, new educational technology, study skills, the general education program, and understanding relationships with professors. Global Studies students, along with students from other majors, understand that students from abroad who interact and form friendships will better adjust to LVC and their new environment. However, students often encounter ignorance, cultural intolerance, negative attitudes, and a relative lack of sensitivity on campus. On the whole, Global Studies students help retain international and U.S. students building and maintaining a friendly and open campus by living and dining together, providing English language support, and writing and tutoring services.

To further advance campus internationalization, Global Studies students created a global education club led by student officers. The club works to facilitate collaboration and support for both U.S. and international students with academic counseling, peer mentoring, cross-cultural workshops, intercultural celebrations, global food and coffee series, student research and study abroad presentations, and international films. The Global Studies majors, the Center for Global Education, and the Global Education Club work in a collaborative fashion to acclimate students, advance cross-cultural communication, develop and sustain friendships and a general sense of belonging, engage in community service activities and events, and promote global learning.

### **Global Studies Within and Beyond the Classroom**

The Global Studies program is organized with the Department of History, Politics, and Global Studies and is coordinated by one faculty director who is responsible for advising 28 majors and 4 minors (as of Spring 2015). Faculty from sociology, foreign languages, economics, and politics teach related courses in the program. The Global Studies curriculum exposes students to core learning principles and ideas while challenging them to meet and fulfill interdisciplinary goals. Research demonstrates the effectiveness of

international and global studies programs in promoting global awareness and intercultural knowledge among students (Abdullahi, Kajberg, & Virkus, 2007; Braskamp & Engberg, 2011; Breuning & Ishiyama, 2004; Brown, Pegg, & Shively, 2006; Gacel-Ávila, 2007, 2009; Hovland, 2005; Johnston & Edelstein, 1993; Qiang, 2003). In particular, Sperandio, Grudzinski-Hall, & Stewart-Gambina (2010) emphasize that true global learning takes place well beyond the conventional classroom. In essence, students learn best when linking new experiences with course-based concepts. Globalized education, especially study abroad, challenges students to contend with perspectives outside of their own personal experiences and hopefully engage in ethical transformation (Hovland, 2010).

The conversion of International Studies into Global Studies was premised on the broader intention of transforming the major into one now emphasizing global interactions, global-local connections, and high impact learning opportunities in addition to the completion of coursework in political science, sociology, economics and foreign language. In doing so, it seeks to ground students' development of core learning competencies on political, socio-cultural, and economic content while retaining a revised area of skills-based courses emphasizing communications, research, service, diversity, and integration. Although assessment data revealed weaknesses in writing competencies, these were addressed by requiring all majors to enroll in experiential and collaborative learning opportunities and research methods as well as by converting the capstone seminar into an integrated research experience requiring majors to complete a career portfolio. While teaching and assessment instruments exist that can promote and measure change in one's understanding of and tolerance for different cultures, Global Studies students would now be exposed to cultural diversity in the form of community-engaged learning, study abroad, and internships to develop essential learning outcomes in the areas of ethical reasoning and intercultural knowledge. Student success in the program depends on embracing the interdisciplinary nature of the courses in sociology, politics, and economics, completion of six credits of foreign language at the 300-level, study abroad, and completion of three high impact experiences (9 credits) and the senior seminar in global studies.

The revised foundational course for majors and minors is "Magnitudes and Dimensions of Globalization," which introduces students to the broad topic of globalization and its consequences as well as to the connections and interactions among individuals, organizations, and governments throughout the world. In the course, students are challenged to identify who has precisely what at stake in a globalizing world, the particular definitions or projects of globalization, and who loses. Put simply, since globalization implies inequality, students must be challenged to consider viewpoints from a multitude of positions and discern the impact of globalization on people, governments, and economic systems. Students analyze globalization with short writing assignments on the operations of global corporations, the impact of non-U.S. made products and services in their daily lives, intercultural diversity on campus, and news articles from global news sources.

In addition to these short writing assignments, Global Studies majors and minors must complete a community-engaged learning project.<sup>1</sup> The project challenges students to make connections among global concepts learned in the course with issues, challenges, and problems impacting the local community and immediate region. The community-engaged project requires that majors develop working relationships with social advocacy and civil society groups in the community. These include non-profit agencies working to address sexual assault and gender discrimination, poverty, education, health protections for women and children, energy and the environment, and immigration and refugees. As the students participate with a local agency, they must document their experiences and complete a reflective paper explaining the roles and responsibilities of the agency or organization they worked with, social, economic, and political conditions in the community, and personal experiences in working with the population served by the organization. Students are required to make connections and establish linkages between their experience and global concepts highlighted in the globalization course.

The overall goal is for students to develop and sharpen their communications skills, understand the importance of global learning, and engage in service in the local community. The incorporation of community-engaged learning into the foundational course expands the importance of connecting global concepts and events with local action and enhances the practice of service in the curriculum. The community-engaged learning project challenges students to assess their own ethical values and the social context of problems, recognize ethical issues in a variety of settings, think about how different ethical perspectives might be applied to social dilemmas and consider the ramifications of alternative actions.

Following the conclusion of the foundational course on globalization, all majors are required to complete introductory and advanced level courses in economics, sociology, and politics. Students must complete nine credits in economics, including microeconomics, macroeconomics, and international finance or trade. In sociology, students complete the introductory-level course and a course in diversity and intercultural communication. Then, majors must complete six credits of politics, which includes conceptions of global power (international relations theory) and one course from the following: Europe in the 20th Century; Comparative Politics; Human Rights and International Law; American Foreign Policy; Contemporary Global Security; Global Politics of Wealth and Poverty; or special topics in global politics. Majors must also complete six credits of foreign language at the conversational level (300-level) or above.

Furthermore, to enhance their information literacy skills, majors must complete a research methods course, in which they collect primary and secondary source material, differentiate peer-reviewed academic journals and texts from non-peer reviewed works, and understand the importance of inferential and descriptive statistical analysis and case study, archival, historical, ethnographic, and survey research. The course devotes several weeks to crafting rigorous literature reviews, collecting empirical data, and identifying legitimate and appropriate information. Students are expected to produce research

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<sup>1</sup> Students who declare the Global Studies major or minor after completing the foundational course are required to complete a community-based project in another required course for the major.

manuscripts that could be presented at an academic conference/professional meeting in the discipline or submitted for consideration of publication to undergraduate academic journals.

Every Global Studies major must also complete at least one study abroad experience offered by the campus study abroad office or in a program offered by another institution. This must be a full semester of study abroad or an approved alternative program, such as full semester-exchange programs, mini-terms (4 to 8 weeks), short-term (4 weeks), or summer programs that may or may not be led by a member of the faculty. Courses taken in off-campus programs can be accepted for credit to the Global Studies major, although approval for such credit is contingent on transfer equivalencies.

In addition to study abroad, Global Studies majors must complete nine credits of so-called “global experiences.” These include a global independent research experience, collaborative undergraduate research, internships, European Union Simulation, and an honors thesis. The first is global independent research experience, in which Global Studies majors receive academic credit for initiating and completing an independent research project while studying abroad for at least one full semester. The student must draft a research proposal that includes the topic, outline, and tentative bibliography. The topic can be aligned with the study abroad experience, inspired by previous research, or consistent with the research interests of an LVC faculty member. Successful completion of the project depends on communication between the student studying abroad and the faculty-supervisor. The idea for this option was inspired by Brown University’s Global Independent Study Project, a unique program that provides undergraduate students the opportunity to conduct independent research under the supervision of a faculty mentor.<sup>2</sup>

The global independent research experience should facilitate the continuation of the student’s research after returning to LVC. However, this is a unique and different experience that demands a considerable degree of self-discipline and scholarly commitment on the part of the student. The experience combines study abroad with autonomous research by challenging students to conduct research and promote interactions with scholars through immersion in research opportunities in the actual environment. The overall goal for students is to learn concepts, theories, methods, data, and academic writing appropriate to the research goals of the major. The experience will also give students the opportunity to strengthen their information literacy and communication skills, improve global learning abilities, and develop a sense of awareness and competence of another culture. This will provide students a unique opportunity to advance their career prospects, develop an interest in graduate school, and build their cross-cultural skills beyond the classroom (see Kuh, 2008).

Students can complete three credits of collaborative undergraduate research with the prerequisites of sophomore standing or above or permission of the instructor. Students collaborate with faculty on actual research projects, learning the particular topic in the

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<sup>2</sup> Brown University’s Global Independent Study Project can be found at:  
<http://www.brown.edu/academics/college/special-programs/international-study/programs/global-independent-study-glisp>

Global Studies discipline, understanding the social science research process, and making an original contribution toward the scholarly understanding of the subject. Collaborative undergraduate research requires that Global Studies majors work closely with at least one member of the faculty. Majors register for one credit each semester until they meet the three credit requirement and meet as a group with the professor over the course of the entire semester based on a regular, mutually-agreed upon schedule. The one credit of collaborative undergraduate research is separate and not attached to another course. In other words, it functions and operates as its own unique course. Research projects provide an intensive experience for the student that complements, enhances, and even surpasses the traditional classroom since the experience normally involves presentation of research at an academic conference in the discipline. Students are considered the primary collaborator-learners with faculty member as collaborator-advisors.

The collaborative undergraduate research experience challenges students to conduct original research on the cutting edge of knowledge and promote interactions with scholars through an immersion in a collaborative research environment. As participants, students learn critical reasoning, research methods, theoretical principles related to the research area, and scholarly communication. The faculty and student collaborators are expected to produce a manuscript that could be presented at an academic conference/professional meeting or submitted for consideration of publication to an academic journal.

Students seeking less research intensive experiences can take three internship credits and be placed in a government agency, non-governmental organization, non-profit, or corporation. Most students who pursue the internship experience do so at regional organizations, such as the World Affairs Council where they work in various capacities in organizing global education, corporate, foreign direct investment, community outreach, or public service programs. Other regional internship opportunities exist at community resource centers, women's and children's health facilities, poverty relief, domestic violence intervention, and refugee and immigrant organizations. Furthermore, students have the opportunity to seek out global internship opportunities while in a full semester study abroad experience. For example, the college's study abroad programs in Shanghai and Valladolid, Spain include internship placements for students. Successful completion of any internship is contingent upon the student writing a reflective paper detailing the experience and linking it to major global concepts and ideas emphasized in the global studies program.

Another option allows students to participate in the popular European Union Simulation course, which offers students an enriching, hands-on, interdisciplinary exploration of the dynamic processes of policy formation in the core institutions of the European Union. Taught by faculty members from the politics department, the course prepares students for participation in the simulation held every November in Washington D.C., organized by the Mid-Atlantic European Union Simulation Consortium (MEUSC). This experiential learning program connects students, majoring mainly in Politics and Global Studies, to EU policy makers and policy making in a unique way, utilizing the simulation experience to bridge the gap between the academic study of the E.U. and the actual political processes of E.U. decision-making bodies. As active simulation participants playing the

roles of ministers in a select E.U. member-state, students are engaged in relevant and topical discussions and debates in E.U. decision-making circles with a different and distinct theme every year.

The Global Studies program culminates in an interdisciplinary capstone experience (Synthesizing the Global Experience) based on the broader and more comprehensive learning goal of integration. The focus of the entire course is on the preparation and oral presentation of a professional portfolio project integrating student course work with study abroad and learning experiences beyond the classroom. The portfolio is designed to help students searching for career opportunities, graduate school applications, applications for scholarships or awards, and interviews for positions on committees and boards. In their portfolio projects, students must include items relevant to their specific career and vocational interests, namely a resume or curriculum vitae (for students interested in graduate school), professional statement of interests, and letters of recommendation. The portfolio provides students with the opportunity to represent and highlight their work on campus internationalization, internships, research and communications skills, foreign language abilities, intercultural knowledge, course assignments, presentations at professional conferences, study abroad, and community service. At the end of the semester, students present their completed portfolios targeted at potential employers or graduate schools.

### **Programmatic Transformation**

There are significant downsides to creating and sustaining global programs focusing exclusively on the classroom. First, it tends to reinforce descriptive and passive learning, undervalues the importance of skills-based learning, and discourages students from making global-local connections and conceptual-practical linkages (Khondker 2004; Roudometof 2005). Second, an exclusive focus on classroom-based experiences could lead students to learning in terms of box checking a sequence of courses. Third, a mostly classroom-based program diminishes the value of requiring students to engage in local and regional communities in the form of community-engaged experiences (Guarasci 1997).

The mission of the Lebanon Valley College Global Studies program challenges students to synthesize research in contemporary global politics, economics, and society with study abroad, language, and collaborative undergraduate research, internships, community-engaged learning, and global independent research experience. Learning outcomes now include:

- Integration: Synthesizing concepts from courses with experiences and skills developed beyond the classroom.
- Objective: In the capstone research experience, students will integrate material from courses with experiences in study abroad and beyond the classroom in a major research paper.
- Global learning: Engaging with global institutions, processes, and systems by culturally engaging with others to become aware of difference and inclusion.



- Objective: In study abroad, beyond the classroom experiences, and in courses, students will be exposed to political, social, and economic ideas and issues, which shape our world today.
- Communication: Developing and expressing ideas in writing and delivering purposeful oral presentation to increase global knowledge and foster an understanding of the world.
- Objective: In introductory and writing-intensive courses, students will develop writing skills in global research papers and articulate ideas in oral presentations and lead discussions.
- Critical thinking: Analyzing academic texts, reading unfamiliar information, and critically linking concepts with global issues and controversies.
- Objective: Students will analyze and critically evaluate global ideas and points of view and recognize the difference between logical argumentation and non-sense.
- Information literacy: Knowing when there is a need for appropriate information and identifying, evaluating, and responsibly sharing that information to address global problems.
- Objective: In writing intensive courses affiliated with the program, research methods, the senior capstone, and in collaborative undergraduate research, students will develop inquiry skills to address research questions, review literature, build theory, explain data, and suggest new courses of action.<sup>3</sup>

Under this configuration, students are challenged to recognize global-local connections and to develop skills for careers in global education, non-governmental organizations, inter-governmental organizations, global corporations, governments, academia and law, journalism, and social advocacy, and graduate and law school programs.

Our intention is to deliver on these desired learning outcomes. In the classroom, students have successfully completed research projects on human rights, female genital mutilation, digital technology, poverty, and international and comparative education issues. Beyond the classroom, students have engaged in internships while on study abroad and at the World Affairs Council, domestic violence and women's health organizations, state government, and international trade and financial investment institutions. They have also completed community-engagement and service learning experiences through churches, environmental groups, poverty relief organizations, and sexual assault agencies. Our recent graduates are now employed at non-profit organizations dedicated to social advocacy as well as colleges and universities in the areas of international student recruitment and admissions as well as international student coordination. Students have also enrolled in graduate school programs with funded assistantships in international and comparative higher education, global studies, and international affairs and international law school programs. One recent graduate was

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<sup>3</sup> Revised learning and objectives were adapted from value rubrics developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U): <http://www.aacu.org/VALUE/rubrics/>

employed with a non-governmental organization and worked in Kosovo on conflict resolution programs and analysis. We hope the revised program will continue to capture the student's imagination that globalization is a process slowly unfolding over time with no singular way to understand the political, economic, and social evolution of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### Concluding Thoughts

In order to build and develop experiential skills required for pursuing productive international careers and preparing them for global citizenship, programmatic revisions place greater emphasis on deeper learning experiences by requiring students to enroll in one less traditional classroom course and engage in additional learning opportunities beyond the classroom. Consistent with desired learning outcomes, our revisions are designed to enhance particular core competences in synthesis and integration, critical thinking, information literacy, communication, and global learning while maintaining disciplinary rigor and requiring all majors and minors to be exposed to academic ideas and principles in international economics, politics, and sociology.

While incomplete, the revisions made to the LVC global studies can hopefully serve as a model for colleges and universities, both large and small. Our program endeavors to challenge students to place their global education within a broader context, one that includes curricular and co-curricular experiences. A strong international program should incorporate political, economic and cultural aspects of the global scene and, in the process, connect learning in the classroom to opportunities and experiences beyond it. Students must be challenged to perceive Global Studies in terms of problems that can be understood and addressed with knowledge, skills, and practical solutions that enable students to address the global problems and challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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## About the Author

**Chris J. Dolan** is Professor of Politics and Director of Global Studies at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pennsylvania. He is the author or co-author of *Striking First, In War We Trust*, and the *Presidency and Economic Policy*, as well as numerous articles in political science and international studies journals and chapters in edited books.