

Are Faculty Ready for Global Competence?

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(This text is part of the introduction to the book

Languages Across the Curriculum: Interdisciplinary Structures and Internationalized Education, eds. Maria-Regina Kecht and Katharina von Hammerstein)

In preparation for a three-day summit meeting of more than 150 world leaders at the United Nations, Secretary General Kofi Annan was repeatedly asked to explain his proposal for a so-called global compact—a sustained cooperation between the United Nations and private corporations. In defense of his outreach to the business world to better address issues of labor standards, environmental pollution, and public health, Mr. Annan stoically observed, "The world around us is changing, and we change with it or we will be left behind. We have to adapt to the realities outside."¹ Referring to the grave criticism of globalization's potentially one-sided gains for the developed world, the Secretary General further insisted, "We must make globalization an engine that lifts people out of hardship and misery, not a force that holds them down."

Kofi Annan is from Ghana; he received his education in the United States and he is very much aware of the challenges arising from our diverse but interdependent world. He has consequently contributed enormously to changes in the United Nations office that would give voice to those countries that do not steer the engine of globalization, but which are drawn by it. National boundaries have become rather irrelevant when we observe, for example, the impact of international connectivity on financial markets, patterns of migration, climate change, spread of epidemics, and threats of terrorism.

There are few social, economic, environmental, or political issues these days that can be addressed in a national context only. What is almost always required is the "big picture." Global reality however has become so complex and "messy," if you will, that not even the most educated and cross-culturally adept individual could attain such a purview. Teams of international experts representing different professions, disciplines, and viewpoints are usually called upon to respond. It is not surprising therefore that 86 percent of corporations (in the U.S.) report in a recent survey that "they will need managers and employees with greater international knowledge in the decade ahead" (American Council on Education 1998, 5). Politicians of all stripes likewise stress that global leadership requires global competency. Even if this appeal to American citizens and voters strikes cords of nationalism and patriotism, many recognize that mental insularity and cultural parochialism will not provide the ingredients for global success, not even for the world's largest economic power.²

The question, however, is really twofold: how can we effectively adapt to "the realities outside," and what qualifications do we need in order to "make globalization an engine that lifts people out of hardship and misery"? For us as educators in the U.S., the pressing concern must be how we can disseminate existing knowledge and generate new knowledge in such a way that our students will be aware of the new realities and, more importantly, ready to shape these realities for the well-being of our global village. Many of the invited public speakers on university campuses urge their audience to take on a global perspective. This means much more than crossing disciplinary boundaries, or looking beyond the academic course of studies, or climbing out of the comfortable ivory tower. The appeal demands nothing less than a change of lifestyle, a conscious evaluation

of one's own perceptions and horizons, as well as serious reflection on the way our daily actions affect the rest of the world. It may seem ironical that these well-intentioned pleas to view intellectual inquiry and decision-making through an international lens do not easily translate into practical action on the part of a university or faculty. Of course, it is easier to present visions—much as they may be informed by real-life needs—than to actualize a desired new state of affairs. Nevertheless, it is amazing how little attention we academics, particularly in the humanities, have paid to "the realities outside" in spite of our seemingly endless discussions of the curriculum. Couldn't we devote time to substantive debates about the learning goals our students need to reach in this information age? Shouldn't we, in our own disciplines and divisions (humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional schools) scrutinize our course offerings and methodologies and then assess their value to our students' education for global competence? Couldn't we reach out to our colleagues across campus and collaboratively develop a curriculum that is marked by integrated, interdependent, interdisciplinary, and in fact, international knowledge acquisition?

I may not be able here to draw up a complete list of the qualifications that characterize a globally competent graduate, but I would like to mention some salient features: s/he is able to access information from a wide variety of sources that span the spectrum of media as well as location; moreover, s/he knows how to "read" the information analytically and critically, recognizing the culturally coded nature of knowledge construction. S/he has the desire to familiarize herself/himself with multiple perspectives on any issue, crediting them with validity, before passing judgment or making choices, and then knows how to draw information synthetically from the selected

sources. S/he has experienced academic or pre-professional work in other cultures, has had many opportunities for interaction with representatives from other countries, and has acquired a professionally functional level of second language proficiency. Communication skills are her/his forte, apart from solid specialization in a chosen discipline: s/he successfully works in a team, approaches tasks in a collaborative style, and reaches out to individuals in other fields when complex problems are to be solved. Her/his communication strategies reflect comprehension of different viewpoints and flexibility in adjusting to new situations. S/he knows that a university education has prepared her for a life-long process of learning that will be challenging as well as rewarding. S/he is convinced that "it is no longer possible to conduct our lives without reference to the wider world or to the historical forces that have shaped the present and will shape the future" (Rosovsky 1990, 106f.). Such globally competent citizens will graduate from institutions with internationalized curricula that help students develop "cultural empathy and a conceptual framework for understanding global issues and interdependence" (Johnston 1999, 4).

Many campuses proudly point to their growing enrollment statistics in study abroad, their increasing numbers of international students, their faculty exchange programs, their international research grants in the sciences, their mandatory non-Western civilization courses, and their (seat-time) language requirement. But upon further probing, it becomes clear that all these "international ventures" are not coordinated at all, nor do they add up to a sum larger than their parts. There may be a few American universities where global literacy is, in fact, already built into the curricular structures and where high levels of language proficiency, as well as cross-cultural

awareness, are demonstrable outcomes. At these special institutions, faculty may also be rewarded "for becoming global thinkers in their teaching and their research" (American Council on Education 1998, 11) and most students may gain first-hand experience of other cultures through study or work abroad. Such institutions are few and far between.

It seems to us that efforts toward a coherent and sustained internationalization of post-secondary education would not only greatly benefit our students—no matter their disciplinary majors—but also reinvigorate liberal arts education with much-needed relevance. A curriculum that leads to recognition and understanding of humanity's connectedness will equip graduates with the confidence and ethical responsibility necessary to contribute to the improvement of the world's affairs. Not many in academe would argue with the lofty goals of a thoroughly internationalized education, but there has been a great deal of resistance to actual change in individual course design, course requirements for majors, college-wide distribution requirements, and exit requirements. Communication among the varied disciplines is, on most campuses, rather difficult and sometimes acrimonious. Potentially shared goals tend to get lost in turf wars and consensus fails when mutual respect is not cultivated.

In his book *We Scholars: Changing the Culture of the University* (1995), David Damrosch argues persuasively for concerted efforts to overcome the "archaic hyperindividualism of our prevailing academic ethos" (7). This hyperindividualism has fostered and rewarded scholarly fragmentation, alienation, and a culture of aggression. He perceives today's highly specialized pursuit of knowledge "in splendid isolation" as a major detriment to establishing "scholarly communication across the lines of differing bodies of knowledge and divergent methods of analysis" (4). It is not with

internationalization in mind that Damrosch discusses his vision of a scholarly community characterized by collaboration and commitment to learning from others' viewpoints. His model, however, would successfully accommodate the purpose and goals of global learning, since it stresses the necessity of new modes of interaction for bringing together specialists from different fields and disciplines. In their research they could jointly produce "a more effective version of many products that are made in isolation" (13). Further, through thematically related courses and well-coordinated interdisciplinary units of learning, they could both teach their students new kinds of critical inquiry and acculturate them into a socially and intellectually interconnected interpretive community. Thus, the next generation of professionals would be educated into a holistic perception of complex phenomena and trained to work collaboratively on problem resolution.

We still have a long way to go before we can proudly refer to such outcomes. For the time being, most of us in academe have to deal with the constraints of rigid disciplinary and hierarchical structures that stymie sustained efforts of communication and collaboration. If few bridges connect the traditional divisions between the sciences, humanities, social sciences, and the professional schools, the links within any of those larger entities are similarly tenuous. In some cases even the sub-fields of a single discipline have drifted so far apart that they end up establishing their own departments and no longer talk to each other. Well, few will be surprised to hear that language departments often refuse to share notes or cooperate in revising their programs—no matter how mutual their problems and goals may be. The institutional context of colleges and universities has unfortunately solidified borders. The multitude of requirements for the students and long list of disincentives for potentially border-crossing faculty members

attest to strict “visa” regulations. At some far-sighted institutions, various forms of incentives and appreciation for those engaged in interdisciplinary research and teaching have been put into place. More commonly, however, rewards do not go to those developing interdisciplinary team-taught courses or to those co-authoring articles or books. Instead, achievement points are deducted since the product had more than one producer. The team-taught course is often considered to weigh less than a “regular” course, despite the fact that it is almost always more time-consuming and intellectually more demanding; collaborative work on the publications list holds less value on the assumption that brain power was shared.

This pervasive institutional drive to keep everything neatly compartmentalized has hardly had a salutary effect on the education of our students toward meeting the challenges of contemporary life. Ernest Boyer, among others, has repeatedly pointed out that undergraduates may dutifully complete their required credits, but “fail to see . . . connections that would give them a more coherent view of knowledge and more authentic, more integrated view of life” (Boyer 1990, 15). Invoking the expression “splintered dumbness,” coined by the scientist Lewis Thomas to describe the outcome of our specialization-driven education, Boyer urges us to rethink our educational mission in order to help students “see themselves as a part of a large human community, and gain a perspective that places them in larger context” (16).

Not only do most of our students currently fail to leave college with such a holistic perspective but they are also, by and large, not afforded sufficient opportunities to see and experience the benefits of a “comprehensive” description of reality. Depending on their major(s), they may have been trained to adopt particular, discipline-dependent

methods, theories, and concepts, while remaining quite ignorant of alternatives. Most troubling is their inadequate preparation for recognizing how specific methods construct reality. Interdisciplinary courses can relativize the absolutist claims of any discipline-specific paradigm and provide "an opportunity to explore in some detail the strengths and limitations of the participating disciplines and their constructed nature" (Davis 1995, 36). Furthermore, if the interdisciplinary course is infused with an international agenda, students are likely to recognize how culture shapes perception and generates different kinds of "truths."

If we can provide our students with a multiplicity of learning opportunities that stress interrelated knowledge, we can also promote the intellectual skill of comparative analysis and comparative thinking (Mestenhauser 1998, 5). A good many courses across the disciplines lend themselves to the practice of thoughtful comparison, which H. Gardner has called the "capacity for analogical/metaphorical thinking" (1993). How much of this is already happening as a matter of pedagogical record, we do not know. Students who have discovered the rewards of operating with such a comparative frame of mind are eager to explore what is different or foreign.

Fortunately, a growing number of our students recognize that their educational experience will have an invaluable "added bonus" if they spend time in another culture. Pre-departure cross-cultural awareness courses fill up quickly and "re-entry" seminars that provide students an academic forum for critical reflection on their growth process have become popular. More and more students look for ways to pursue individualized study abroad. Even though most student travelers prefer sheltered programs in European capitals, quite a few seek out places far off the beaten track: Ulan Bator, Harare, Calcutta,

Sofia . . . It seems that many entering freshmen are conceptually more globally oriented than the faculty they meet on our campuses. Many students want to continue the foreign language they had in high school by undertaking an internship abroad or studying at a foreign university. If they are able to persuade their parents of the value of such plans, they may still have to negotiate such "luxury" with their advisor, who might show them the long list of requirements and wonder out loud how time abroad could possibly be built into the tight schedule. Even though in 1999 the number of American students studying abroad increased by about fifteen percent over the previous year, this amounts to only about nine percent of the entire undergraduate population.³ Less than a third of these students spend a semester or more in other cultures and very few belong to minority groups. This rather deplorable situation will improve only if the structures of our post-secondary education become more flexible and respond creatively to the "need to get smarter [in order] to survive in a world without walls."⁴ As much as we can foster cultural awareness through various academic courses and strong classroom-to-classroom connections via the Internet, these are hardly a substitute for students' immersion in a foreign culture and their first-hand experience of otherness.

We often do not even maximize our students' on-campus opportunities for the kinds of critical self-reflection and intellectual growth that can be fostered by engagement with foreign viewpoints. Our graduate programs in the sciences and in engineering are filled with students from Africa, Asia, and Europe. Many of them know little more about America than U.S. students know about the homelands of these "visitors". They often go through arduous adjustment stages complicated by cultural miscommunication inside and outside the seminar room. We generally do not make it our business to help those

international students integrate into the campus culture, nor do we realize the enormously valuable resource they represent for our educational enterprise. Or, if we realize it, we have been slow to act upon it.⁵ International students could contribute to classes as well as to extra-curricular activities through their knowledge about their country, their native languages, their way of seeing and constructing the world, and their perception of their American environment. Such structured interaction between "cultures" would not only enhance the quality of campus life, but would also help our students—whether U.S- or foreign-born—to develop cultural empathy, a critical quality of global competency.

Culture learning has surely become a significant aspect of courses offered in many language departments. We can attribute this partly to students' increased demand for it, but we also believe that the theoretical debates in Cultural Studies and the guidelines of the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (1999) have been shaping this transformation. It must be stressed, however, that resituating and redefining the process of language learning has not come easy.⁶ For many faculty members the first step is the hardest: overcoming the long-standing inappropriate separation between the traditional focus on skills acquisition in lower level language courses and the focus on content (usually narrowly limited to literature) in upper level courses. Some may have hoped that an expanded notion of "culture" encompassing film, non-fiction, advertising, etc. would be sufficient evidence of reform. Others again, who may be staunch advocates of Cultural Studies, tend to neglect their students' second language acquisition or may, in fact, prefer to teach about culture in English. And yet another group of faculty in that same (hypothetical) language department may recognize the reasons for changing patterns in student course selection. But these faculty members

who are perturbed by the declining enrollments in traditional author- or period courses, and by the huge losses from second to third and third to fourth year courses, may not have the authority to press for swift and radical reforms.

Few language/literature departments have convincingly addressed the need to change their educational mission and contemplate its implication for the curriculum in this digital age. In the meantime, students vote with their feet, forcing chairs of language departments and deans of humanities to address the situation in a state of emergency. Perhaps a sense of being under siege, a feeling of helplessness, and a growing awareness of inadequate preparation for the demands of internationalized education underlie resistance to colleagues' and administrators' calls for academics in the languages to thoroughly re-evaluate their course offerings, their course content, and their pedagogy. The following concerns have plagued most language departments for some time: a steady drop of enrollments in French, German, Italian, and Russian (to name just the most commonly represented languages) and sky-rocketing numbers in Spanish, requiring the hiring of many part-time adjunct instructors; an increasing discrepancy between students' pragmatic, career-related needs for language learning and faculty's adherence to rather narrow or esoteric topics; a profound bifurcation—in status, recognition, and pay—between those teaching large numbers of students in lower-level language courses and those teaching highly specialized upper-level courses to a handful of students; a rather contentious relationship between a public (and university officers) that demand(s) assessment of students' learning outcomes and language faculty that resist such accountability.

None of these problems invite simple solutions, but they can be addressed successfully. When instructors are willing to share responsibility for their students' success in the language/culture classroom and when they are ready to retool—at various levels and in various forms—they can confidently meet the challenges of the new learning environment.

Many of us are willing to find ways to shape institutional structures in ways that would allow for the further development of professional specialization on the one hand and broad interdisciplinary and intercultural understanding on the other. Foremost, we need to implement a curriculum that enables our students to learn how to systematically access and critically process information generated by other nations and in other languages; how to develop communication strategies that reflect an appreciation of diverse perspectives and respect for culturally different thinking; how to work collaboratively in interdisciplinary and international teams; how to assume responsibility for a world beyond the borders of their own country; and how to recognize the need for competent and cosmopolitan engagement with global concerns. Within the complex structure of higher education, language and culture learning across the disciplinary boundaries can function as a significant building block toward the realization of these curricular goals. This is really the time when we want to assure our students that we *will* provide them with knowledge, capabilities, and some pre-professional experience that guarantees global competence. And then we can join Siemens and other corporations in stating proudly, “We can do that!”

¹ “Globalization Tops 3-Day U.N. Agenda for World Leaders,” *New York Times*, September 3, 2000. A1 and A4.

² In his speech on “The Growing Importance of International Education,” delivered on April 19, 2000, U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, noted: “Every sensible leader recognizes that the wealth of a nation in the information age—the economic, social and cultural wealth—lies in its people and what they know and can do. Whether a country prospers economically depends largely on its human capital; whether democracies old and new flourish, and whether citizens treat one another with trust and respect depends on the values and practices that can be learned both at home and in school. Education is the key determinant of the success of individuals as well as nations.” For the full text of his speech, see <http://www.opendoorsweb.org/>

³ For detailed statistics on study abroad, international exchange programs, and international students on U.S. campuses, see the website “Open Doors” by the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of Education, <http://www.opendoorsweb.org/>

⁴ Tom Friedman, foreign affairs correspondent for the *New York Times*, quoted by Richard Riley in his speech.

⁵ The U.S. government certainly realizes what economic benefits the influx of international students brings: almost 500,000 students from abroad contribute approximately \$13 billion to the economy on an annual basis.

⁶ For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Dorothy James, “Bypassing the Traditional Leadership: Who’s Minding the Store” (1997) and the series of replies printed in *Association of Departments of Foreign Languages Bulletin* 29.2 and 29.3.