

Globalization And The Regional Campus: Issues In Globalizing The Class Syllabi

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the challenges and issues in implementing a globalized syllabus in an undergraduate sociology course and describes the author's as well as her students' experiences in a course designed to be globalized or internationalized. With the author and students coming from different class and racial backgrounds, the author found that she and the students had to negotiate their meanings of globalization and try to understand in very diverse ways how globalization affects students' lives every day. Some of the challenges and issues that emerged are: the gap between what the professor's point of view on globalization was and the students' view; the relative lack of information or perhaps awareness that the students had regarding globalization; the misinformation about the consequences of globalization on their lives (most thought it was a negative thing) as well as the lack of previous classes that most students had on the relationships of the United States with other countries of the world.

These experiences contribute interesting information regarding diversity issues inside the classroom. Do U.S. universities have curricula that can adequately address the diversity issues of a globalized world? Students coming out of regional campuses will have to deal with a globalized workplace, and they should be equipped to handle the challenges that they will face as future members of a very diverse workforce.

Introduction

Anyone who has been working in the academic world for the last two decades would not have missed the call for diversity in the college curriculum. University after university has reviewed and re-evaluated

its various course listings and designated courses that have been perceived to tackle diversity issues. However, what exactly does diversity mean? Does this mean looking at differences as brought about by gender, class, race, sexual orientation, and physical ability within American society? Do these analytical categories adequately equip students to face the real world after college? Looking at the historical changes occurring in the last twenty years, one may note that there is an apparent need to go beyond just merely looking at U.S. society and to see diversity in terms of its international context. In other words, there is a need to internationalize or globalize our curriculum. This paper describes my experiences as well as my students' experiences in an introduction to sociology course which I have designed to be globalized or internationalized.

Globalization has "typically been seen as a recent process that generalizes the conditions of capitalist production, distribution, and consumption throughout the world" (Dickinson, 1997: 111). Globalization also implies the blurring of national boundaries as well as the growing interdependence of countries with one another. Because of the insidious effects of an ever-expanding capitalistic system and rapidly changing computer technology, we are without doubt linked to each other, either here or with others across the globe. As these links become complex, we can no longer ignore the fact that what happens to one part of the world will have an impact on our lives here in the United States.

Moreover, millions now cross daily national boundaries as migrants, tourists, or overseas workers. People from other countries bring with them their own unique cultural characteristics and ways of interactions. There are very few countries that have remained homogeneous in terms of their population. Cross-cultural or cross-national interactions are becoming more common for members of the American society.

Yet despite the rapidly changing nature of world relations, American universities have blissfully remained parochial. Why is this so? Perhaps, it is our hegemonic position in the world today that perpetuates parochialism in many of our universities. Our powerful position has led us to believe that there is really no need to study other cultures since members of these cultures tend to follow and copy American ways. These ideas may also be reinforced by the fact that some education systems in

developing countries use American books to teach their own students. For example, as an undergraduate student in the Philippines, I remember using an American text to study social psychology. It was quite hard to translate concepts such as individualism, competitive spirits, as well as divorce to a culture that has emphasized familism, smooth personal relationships, and lifetime marriages.

The discipline of sociology has not been spared this American-centered view of society. Several sociologists (Martin, 1996; Wagenaar and Subedi, 1996; Crittenden, 1994) have stated that even if the call to take sociology out of its parochial orientation started as early as forty years ago, there have been very few efforts to internationalize or globalize the sociology curriculum. This call for a reorientation toward a globalized curriculum is ironic in the face of the history of sociology. When sociology emerged as a science in Europe in the 1800s, it was based on comparative studies of different societies. The three classical sociologists—Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber—focused on cross-national studies. Durkheim's *Suicide* (1951) compared suicide rates among three European societies. Lie (1994) contends that it is only when American sociology with its focus on empirical data began to dominate the discipline that emphasis on the United States became imperative for aspiring American sociologists. Unfortunately, the trend continues until today.

One of the more common attempts to globalize a curriculum is through the study abroad programs. Students who have the opportunity to live and study in a foreign culture acquire a broader perspective about life than what they would have developed had they stayed in an American college. However, study abroad is not always available to students. Wagenaar and Subedi (1996) state that students who enroll in study abroad programs may be self-selected and tend to prefer European countries over developing areas. Moreover, students who study abroad also encounter problems such as a shortage of funds, healthcare while abroad, security, etc. (Wagenaar and Subedi, 1996). Some educators have also written about their own experiences in programs that involved cultural immersion in other societies and how such experiences have facilitated their teaching of globalized courses. (See Lindsey and Chirayath, 1994; Vaughan, 1994.) Crittenden (1994) suggests that universities give more attention to what foreign teaching assistants can offer in terms of globalizing the curriculum.

Teaching at a regional campus also presents unique challenges for implementing a globalized syllabus. In my university, although most faculty have the academic freedom to determine their own courses, there are still some faculty members who need to follow requirements as outlined by their departments on the parent campus. Thus, teaching innovations that may include a globalized approach may not always be feasible. The student population itself is not as diverse as the one found in the bigger campus, and thus it may be parochial by comparison. Very few students have interacted with members of other national origins, much less people from developing areas. In fact, some students informed me that their first interaction with people from developing countries were those with the foreign faculty members.

Isolationism and parochialism no longer have a room in today's world (Lindsey and Chirayath, 1994). Martin (1996) notes that despite efforts to internationalize the curriculum, there is still a dearth of courses that are actually globalized. Also, courses that do incorporate international materials merely compare the current conditions in the United States with other countries without any attempt to analyze the historical background that shaped the global relationships between countries. Approaches are often ahistorical and assumptions tend to emphasize progress as westernization.

This paper is about my attempts to globalize a lower-division sociology course. Introduction to sociology is a liberal education requirement and thus a course that attracts many students in their first two years. The course's main objective is to equip students with basic sociological concepts and skills that can help them understand their social world. From the very start, I have emphasized that we will adopt a globalized approach, meaning that we will be talking not only about the United States but about other countries as well. Furthermore, we will also analyze U.S. relations with the rest of the world.

Methodology

Data for this paper comes from surveys I gave during the first month of the spring 2000 semester. Students enrolled in my two introduction to sociology classes that semester filled out a survey that had five open-ended questions about globalization. These questions were: 1) What do

you understand by the word, "Globalization?"; 2) In what ways do you think you have been affected by globalization?; 3) Before this sociology class you are currently enrolled in, have you had any other classes that had internationalized, multicultural syllabi or dealt with other cultures or countries other than the United States? If yes, what were these classes?; 4) Do you think it is necessary for students in the United States to take courses dealing with multicultural or international subject matters? Why or why not?; 5) Do you have any suggestions regarding what you would like to see in an internationalized or globalized syllabus?

Fifty-seven students answered the questionnaire. Out of this 57, 35 were first-year students, 8 were sophomores, and 13 were juniors or seniors. Ninety percent of the first year students had at least one semester of college work. The survey asked students to classify their student standing in terms of being a first-year person, a sophomore, a junior, or a senior.

I then coded the answers by sorting them out into different categories (example, positive view of globalization or negative view of globalization). I also categorized them according to student standing, thinking that juniors and seniors were going to have better understanding of globalization than the first-year and sophomore students.

Findings And Discussions

Students in these two introductory sociology courses are relatively homogeneous in terms of socioeconomic background. They are mainly from white, working class families. Only a small percent of the students actually live outside of the school's service area, and fewer still had overseas experiences. Thus, for most of them, any non-sensationalized information about other countries came from the classes they took either in high school or during their first two years in college.

One of the earliest challenges to doing a globalized syllabus is to find a book that itself takes a global approach. Among the ones that I have used is Joan Ferrante's *Sociology: A Global Approach*. However, the presentation of materials is still based on disjointed discussions of various cultures. The newest version of Robert Schaeffer's *Introduction to Sociology* actually presents better cross-national discussions. However, the discussions are still ahistorical in terms of the U.S. relationships with

the countries presented in various chapters. The search for a satisfactory textbook is still on.

Based on their responses in the survey, few (less than 20 percent) of my students indicated that they had taken other courses that had an internationalized syllabus or had incorporated countries other than the U.S. in class discussions. Most of the courses mentioned are courses that we traditionally expect to have an international flavor—world geography, western civilizations or history of civilizations, language courses, and one particular music class (music as a world phenomenon). It is also important to point out that most of the internationalized courses are themselves Eurocentric, thus the tendency for students to see non-Western cultures as being less important in the process of globalization. It should not be surprising to us that most of the students bring with them ideas about other countries and the U.S. relationships with these countries based on what has been said in the mass media. For example, in the media-sensationalized case of Elian Gonzalez, most of my students believed that the boy should not go back to that “communist” country where he will live in poverty and not enjoy things like free education, and, of course, trips to amusement parks.

The lack of information or perhaps misinformation about other countries is a crucial factor in teaching students the intricate international relationships we see today. For example, when I introduce the concept of the sociological imagination (which C.W. Mills in 1959 defined as “the awareness of the relationship between an individual and the wider society”), students find it quite difficult to relate what is happening to the world of their daily lives. During one class discussion, we were talking about the collapse of the Japanese economy, and I asked them how they think this would affect them. Most could not see how they would be affected by something that happened almost 10,000 miles away.

Most students, however, have a basic idea what globalization is but in a very abstract way. Most associated globalization with cultural amalgamation, but perhaps, given the fact that they were doing the survey in a sociology classroom, this response should be expected. The following are typical examples of what they have written down in the survey:

The diffusion of a culture or beliefs throughout the entire world. How everything in the world interacts with everything else. How people, countries, nations behave, react, and depend on one

another.

Learning about different cultures around the world. Possibly accepting these cultures into your own. Like practicing certain beliefs of other cultures.

I think of the idea that every place in the world is moving towards one way of living and thinking. Kind of like the Euro will be the only currency in Europe. Soon we will have only one currency for the world.

The gap between my own definitions of globalization as more of a consequence of the spread of capitalism than cultural amalgamation was clearly evident in this case. Thus, as part of their and my learning process inside the classroom, we searched for examples that would illustrate the spread of capitalism which resulted in the creation of common patterns within cultures. For example, when I discussed global stratification, I used the examples of how workers in third world countries laboring in industrial workplaces learn to adapt to western workplaces and develop work ethics that are comparable to those found in the West. I also talked about how historical relationships, such as colonialism, had created the current economic disparities between nations that were the colonizers and nations that were colonized.

Guiding students to think critically about how globalization affects them personally is also a challenge. Though students have some ideas about how globalization affects them, these ideas are again still at an abstract level. Several have mentioned being affected in terms of the music they listen to (I have strong suspicions that they were referring only to British music), eating foods that were originally from other countries, fashion trends, or TV shows. There are both positive and negative views on the effects of globalization in their lives. Among the positive responses, students have focused on their opportunities to interact with people from different national origins and learn about different cultures. As some students have written down in the survey,

I feel that my clothing and other objects such as the computer and television have affected my life. The products come from other countries and we use them each day.

I think in the US that we are affected by globalization on a

daily occurrence, whether it is socializing with someone of a different ethnic background or just by daily occurrences like the music we listen to or a movie we watch.

Since ideas and cultures are easily spread through a globalized system, one is able to learn much about other cultures and beliefs. Foreigners migrate here and bring customs, foods, technology here and it becomes a part of our lives as well as theirs.

I have been affected by globalization by having to interact with people of other nations and cultures. I think it has made me a better person because it taught me to tolerate differences in people and to look past their differences to get to know the real person [sic].

Perhaps, this statement coming from a senior student sums up how most students perceive the effects of globalization in their daily lives.

Globalization of markets has had a direct impact on our economy. Globalization of the Internet has enabled me to have contact with people on the European continent whom I otherwise would have never met. Globalization of information had made me aware of issues in other parts of the globe that I would not have been aware of before.

There were also negative reactions to globalization. Most of these reactions were based on sentiments that threatened the stability of the United States:

I think I have been affected because nowadays everyone puts pressure on you to learn a different language. Especially Spanish, because of all the Mexican people that come to the U.S.

Wars in other countries take our military and families in the U.S. We are forced to live without our spouses. Jobs are being sent to other countries, making unemployment rise in the U.S.

Our service area suffered from corporate downsizing due to job exportation. Several of our students have seen their parents lose their jobs in this downsizing. The older students (nontraditional) actually remembered how the city was devastated with the massive unemployment after the

downsizing. This experience could be one of the main factors why some students did not see globalization in a favorable light.

Almost all except two of the students have stated that it is necessary for students in the U.S. to take courses dealing with internationalized subject matters. For most of them, taking classes with an internationalized content allows them to interact better with different segments of the U.S. population. Typical responses include:

America is a "melting pot." It is very important for Americans to be sensitive to culture issues that may affect your friends, neighbors, work associates etc.

Our culture changes so much. New people with different cultures come and go, and we should learn about their ways. Learning about international and multicultural subject matters will help us to understand and get along better with people that have different backgrounds.

So many Americans think that our culture is the only acceptable one. It's important that they realize there are different cultures out there and we can learn things from them.

I think it is important (to study international subject matters) because America today has so many different cultures mixed in it that it is important for us to understand these cultures and why they are different. Also to understand their different view.

Other students have begun to indicate a broader understanding of global relationships. They realize that the U.S. is not an isolated country and that whatever happens to other countries will impact the U.S.:

The US is dependent upon other countries and nations for our economy and peace; we are not the sole torch carriers of nonviolence. In dealing with other countries, the US can also learn and appreciate other cultures on the basis of their own merit.

We need to know people in other parts of the world. Not just that they exist, but who they are so that we can relate them to us. So that in all things there is human compassion, a connection.

Unfortunately, their early college experiences do not seem to address

their needs for a more globalized approach to teaching. As mentioned earlier, there are very few courses that introduce international materials in their syllabi. Apparently, the call for diversity in my own university is still mired in a parochialism in which diversity is still defined as American diversity.

What To Do

Perhaps, it is easier for a sociologist who has a cross-comparative subspecialty to call for globalization of the curriculum. However, the gap between the reality of a globalized world and what we teach in the classroom need to be addressed in order to serve the needs of students who will find themselves in a globalized workplace. Some faculty may want to internationalize their curriculum but may be discouraged by the work it may entail. Here are some strategies I propose to faculty who are initially venturing into globalized syllabi. I hope these can at least ease the birth pains of developing internationalized syllabi.

First and foremost, one can utilize the Internet to obtain information that would enhance students' understanding of other cultures. The Internet itself is perhaps one of the most significant factors why we see a globalized world today. It penetrates national boundaries and allows people of different cultures to be linked with one another through a click of the mouse. A professor can create a Website for the class which contains links to other countries. In a class exercise that I used last summer, I had students do an Internet search on eating folkways found in other cultures. The students found this to be an enlightening experience. Class projects could include mini-research on non-Western cultures and research into what types of relationships (both contemporary and historical) the United States has with these cultures. In such research, students may understand the process of globalization and interdependent relationships between the different countries.

The class Website could also contain links to research institutions that focus on globalization as it effects people's lives. A good example of this is the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Website on Women, Globalization, and Trade (www.ifias.ca). This Website serves as a clearinghouse for information, research, and activities of women as they become involved in globalization through trade.

Second, and perhaps what I believe to be the most ideal, is the

faculty's immersion in a different culture to learn what it is all about. Nothing beats personal experience to enhance one's teaching. Several educators have indicated how living in another culture gave them insights that cannot be gained from mere reading of books about that particular culture. (See Lindsey and Chirayath, 1994; Vaughan, 1994.) Travel or cross-comparative research allows us to go back inside our classrooms with renewed or stronger commitments to broaden our students' understanding of their social worlds. The Fulbright grants are one of the best places to look for funding for these types of endeavors.

Another way is to establish exchange programs between American universities and universities abroad. My university, for example, has exchange programs with Chinese and Russian universities, and we already have had some faculty members do short-term teaching assignments or visitations in these universities. I have also tried as much as possible to ask some of our foreign exchange professors to address my classes on cultural diversity.

Last, we should not hesitate to venture into interdisciplinary teaching. Some disciplines, such as sociology and anthropology, by the nature of their subject matter may be more internationalized than others. By harnessing what our colleagues know and combining these with our own discipline, we create more relevant courses for our students. One way to do this is to evaluate current courses being offered at the regional campus to see which ones can be team-taught by faculty members. The administration should also provide incentives for interdisciplinary teaching among the faculty members.

The need to globalize our curriculum is more important now than ever. As has been argued in this paper, we can no longer remain parochial in our orientation and follow somewhat isolationist assumptions by ignoring what is happening to the rest of the world. Our students have to deal with a globalized workplace, and they should be equipped to handle the challenges that they will face as future members of this economy.

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Biography

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