

Internationalizing APSA

A Report from the Working Group to ACE

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April 2, 2006

The committee members wish to thank APSA President Margaret Levi, Linda Lopez, Michael Brintnall, Isis Leslie, and Michael Woodruff for providing institutional support to facilitate our discussions at APSA headquarters in Washington, D.C. and at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington.

Internationalizing Political Science

The American Political Science Association Working Group endorses the ACE call to internationalize undergraduate education the discipline of political science, and across the curriculum. We recognize an urgent need for our citizens to better understand the cultural, economic political, security and environmental challenges of our time from more than one national perspective, consistent with earlier reflections on the state of the field.¹ The preparation of our undergraduate and graduate students, our new faculty, and ourselves depends upon a serious rethinking of how we learn, how we teach, what we expect students and ourselves to know, and how we engage internationally across all sub-fields of political science.

According to recent studies, measures of international engagement are low: less than 5% of our school teachers have experience in the international area; and less than 15% of college students take at least four credits of internationally focused coursework. Furthermore, while scholars in the comparative and IR subfields in political science characteristically have international perspectives, U.S. faculty members across the disciplines, including many political scientists, have far less training and engage in far less international research, travel and collaboration than their peers overseas.²

At a time when our nation's health and security demand greater understanding of international and global issues, we find political science undergraduates' knowledge and understanding of political systems outside the United States to be weak and underdeveloped and our graduate programs to often provide weak training in international perspectives. The situation is particularly

troublesome today because as many US citizens (including any unemployed worker or reservist) can tell you, policies that profoundly affect us are increasingly influenced by decisions made in other countries and international regimes. As a discipline, we can embrace ignorance and hope the rest of the world becomes more like the United States. Or, we can recognize the scope of the problem and take proactive steps as a profession to develop and enhance our students' and our own international perspectives.³ This document aims to move us strategically toward accomplishing the second option by beginning a conversation, offering a set of goals and beginning to identify best practices in the discipline.

To address the imperative of internationalization, the working group recommends a set of goals to be considered by departments and faculty that include the development of cultural competency and empathy to encourage us to see the world through the eyes of others; to recognize the interconnectedness of the world; and to be able to discern similarities and differences across peoples and cultures. In our view, political science students and faculty will be better served by a disciplinary and interdisciplinary commitment to international education, in a competitive, increasingly interactive world economy. As David Mason has noted, “[g]lobal education involves learning about those problems and issues which cut across national boundaries and about the inter-connectedness of systems—cultural, ecological, economic, political and technological. Global education also involves learning to understand and appreciate our neighbors who have different cultural backgrounds from ours; to see the world through the eyes and minds of others; and to realize that other people of the world need and want much the same things.”⁴

But, sadly, in the field of political science today, not only is it possible for an undergraduate major in political science to receive a B.A. without enrolling in a single course with an international, comparative or global emphasis, it is possible for Master's students and new faculty to emerge from graduate programs with very little international training. The committee recommends a reexamination of undergraduate and graduate education in political science, to require at least one course at the graduate and undergraduate levels with international or comparative dimensions as well as to infuse courses offered across the subfields, in American politics or theory, for instance, with an international, comparative or global dimension. For example, comparing a scholarly analysis of American federalism to the evolution of the European Union's system of states; or assigning another society's explanation for American exceptionalism; and/or considering how the accounts of international political scientists can account for power, politics and policy across societies enriches the teaching and learning of our undergraduates. The adoption of goals such as "understanding the comparative context of U.S. politics" opens up the possibilities for students to focus on how the U.S. compares and contrasts with other political systems; how the U.S. influences other countries and how we, in turn, are influenced by others; and how other societies see the U.S. and its politics and policies. We also encourage faculty and graduate programs to incorporate the historical and cultural context of politics in other societies to encourage critical thinking, reflection, and empathy.

Other graduate student and faculty development programs the committee endorses include opportunities, such as scholarship awards for conducting research

abroad, at designated partner institutions and an APSA sponsored summer workshop modeled on the NEH summer program at Chautaugua and/or the NSF training in statistics summer program at the University of Michigan. The committee also notes that the acquisition of international research quarters is facilitated by long-standing relationships with universities outside the U.S -- such as the University of Washington's partnership with the University of Bergen, Norway -- quarters to be offered to colleagues from all disciplines of the university. Such institutional relationships also encourage international research collaboration, and joint publications.

The field will benefit from continuing to identify best practices, and imagining how political science training might evolve through different paths to internationalizing the profession. To effectively internationalize both the faculty and learning environments, our efforts must be multi-level (involving institutions, departments, and classrooms). The following is a discussion of other best practices to internationalization the committee endorses that address general education goals, faculty development, global classrooms and international collaboration.

Internationalization: Best Practices

Many universities and colleges have adopted a general education approach to internationalization. Assigning a common book to the entering class around a global theme is one strategy increasingly popular post-9/11. Approximately twenty

universities and colleges in the United States adopt a book for first-year students, and actively encourage (or require) student engagement—from essay competitions, to writing assignments and e-portfolios profiling reflections on these books—many of which offer unique international perspectives.⁵

Other campuses have implemented changes in the general curriculum, and distribution requirements to encourage cultural competency and international engagement. Administrative leaders (Deans, Directors and Chairs) may offer seed money for faculty to reform, revise or reinvent a course or set of courses around an international or comparative theme, and provide incentives for internationalizing the curriculum.

Explicit adoption of institutional learning goals, consistent with national accreditation requirements, may also be appropriate. For example, a set of skills desirable upon graduation could be adopted by a department of political science, and directly tied to the curricular path(s) of each sub-field. If students in the major should be able to demonstrate the achievement of “learning outcomes” -- to describe, predict, explain, prescribe and participate -- in distinct political systems, the structure and content of courses, programs, and summer opportunities should reflect these priorities.⁶

The committee also encourages increased recognition among faculty, departments, colleges and universities that many opportunities for international engagement occur in centers around the world—without implying the necessity of foreign study. For example, Steve Lamy (Political Scientist, USC) brings students in his international relations courses to Washington, D.C. to engage with

representatives from many of the embassies around a common issue or problem in foreign policy making. Other institutions of higher education forge partnerships to facilitate international education and cultural competency—from cooperation agreements, to faculty and graduate exchange programs. More and more American universities operate centers of international education with learning spaces, apartments, and computer facilities supporting the academic programs of a diversity of fields—including political science. Creative sharing of access between and among universities and colleges (permitting one university with a center in China to offer space to another university with a center in Rome) further internationalizes higher education in an era of scarce resources.

And, as the research of Committee member, Pamela Martin, shows, global classroom technologies link students from distinct cultures and political systems and connect faculty in new, collaborative ways. Distance learning opportunities provide a novel way for students and faculty in political science to engage in critical discussions, develop cultural competency, and better understand the perspectives of others. New technologies continue to improve the quality of the interactions and the number of collaborators possible.

Other best practices include experiential for-credit programs that combine service and distance-learning models around international issues/themes or problems. And, as new faculty join the university community, orientation programs offer a rich opportunity to encourage faculty to consider the opportunities for international professional development and acquisition of global classroom technologies available on the university campus.

APSA WEBSITE

The committee, with the assistance of APSA staff, also supports the development of a web tool to guide faculty in developing international and global initiatives relying on best practices. These include Globalization 101.org with the Occasional Papers from the American Forum for Global Education; Center for the Study of Global Change, Global Nomads Group, and The Globalist; updated information concerning conferences and materials pertaining to the internationalization of the discipline and the ongoing work of faculty, academic departments and universities.

We encourage the other committees of APSA, including the scholarship of teaching and learning initiative, to work with us to promote a collective discussion and implementation of international goals and dissemination of best practices for the field of political science. Promoting international awareness and a diversity of perspectives across all sub-fields of the discipline, as well as encouraging serious reflection by the faculty on the requirements within the profession will benefit the liberal education of a new generation of scholars and enrich our understanding of the complexity of politics and power in an interconnected world.

Thank you to APSA and ACE for providing us with the opportunity to critically evaluate the state of international teaching and learning in political science.

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¹ Addresses and calls for action by two APSA Presidents (Suzanne Rudolf and Margaret Levi) at annual of the profession; The Atlantic Council of the United States in collaboration with the American Historical Association, the American Political Science Association, the Association of American Colleges and the American Conference of Academic Deans, “Post World War II International Relations As a Component of General Education Programs in American Colleges and Universities,” Washington, D.C, 1989; and “U.S. International Leadership for the 21st Century: Building a National Foreign Affairs Constituency,” Washington, D.C.. 1987.

² David Mason, Report to the Working Group on Internationalizing APSA, March 1, 2006.

³ Professor Mark Cassell, meeting in Washington, D.C. at APSA Headquarter, June 10, 2005.

⁴ K. Tye, (ed)., Global Education: From Thought to Action (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), 1991.

⁵ For example, Louisiana State University, Boston College and the University of Washington have each adopted Tracy Kidder's, Mountains Beyond Mountains, which profiles how Dr. Paul Farmer advocates for an integrated solution to global health problems.

⁶ Steven Lamy, USC, refers to these learning goals as DEPPP.