

Talk on Global Education and the 21st Century
Presented to the Faculty Senate
Western Michigan University
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Madam President, members of the Senate, faculty and guests.

It is indeed an honor for me to stand before you because I am strongly of the view that when we speak of the university, we are in fact speaking of the faculty. Perhaps I have a bit of romanticism left in me, but I think there is value in reminding ourselves from time-to-time that, if we remove the buildings, the bureaucracy, the football team and all the other extraneous elements, we can, in fact, find our way back to that most romantic notion of a community of scholars—a university.

It is also a particular honor for me to have this opportunity to share some thoughts on global or international education, as I see it.

It is common these days to speak about globalization and globalizing our university—even the Institute that I now direct is named the Haenicke Institute for Global Education. Many would say this is just the latest in a long list of buzz words that Americans, and particularly America's academics, are fond of coining as a way of compartmentalizing or otherwise over simplifying some aspect of life in general or our specific condition within the academy.

Yet we rarely make serious inquiry into the meaning of the buzz word itself or the context in which we may be using global in any of its various constructs.

One of the greater curiosities that I have noted in the context of discussions of globalizing the university is that we always illustrate our success in the process by counting students and student activities—the favorite of every university being, of course, counting the numbers of students participating in study abroad programs. Or here at Western, we sometimes speak of the numbers of students enrolled in our interdisciplinary program as majors or minors in Global Studies. Even I may choose to boast that our introductory course in global studies enrolled more than 80 students in the fall semester and now has a full compliment of 90 students in the spring semester.

While as an aside, I might assure you that I am particularly proud that Western is among the rare few institutions even offering such an interdisciplinary option for undergraduate students, it is important, I think, that we recognize the disconnect between this propensity to discuss global or international education only in terms of students within the framework of my earlier observation that the faculty is the university.

Let me highlight this disconnection by stating without equivocation that if we want to globalize the university and the faculty, by definition, is the university—should we not devote most of our energy and most of our thinking to globalizing the faculty?

Please do not construe what I am saying to suggest that students are unimportant or that our most countable of student endeavors, study abroad, is unimportant. It is not my intention to diminish the importance of either.

Nevertheless, as I believe, however naively, the university is the faculty, then globalization of the university must mean—indeed cannot be anything else but—globalization of the faculty.

How else—by what other means—might we be assured that every student graduating from Western Michigan University carries with him or her the needed perspectives and understandings to function in the contemporary world which we so readily label as globalizing or globalized?

Let me digress with two illustrative stories—admittedly about students—but illustrative too of our failure to address internationalizing or globalizing the faculty.

Sometime in 2002, during the time when the many new federal security arrangements which came to be known as SEVIS were being developed in Washington and imposed upon those more or less unwilling American universities hosting international students, I happened to visit the international offices of one of our larger Midwestern land-grant universities.

The head of the office there lamented his bureaucratic challenge in this way: “We have approximately 5,000 international students, but that is just the tip of the iceberg. We also have about 2,500 foreign visiting scholars come to our campus each year, and nearly one-third of our faculty hold non-U.S. passports.”

With a sigh, he explained that SEVIS recordkeeping requirements applied to all of these people.

Although I sympathetically tried to absorb the magnitude of his bureaucratic challenge, a more important issue came to my mind. “Mr. Director,” I asked, “with 5,000 international students, 2,500 visiting scholars and nearly a third of the faculty non-Americans, how is it possible that 80 or 90 percent of your graduating seniors could not find Malaysia on a map, if their graduation depended upon it?”

With a somewhat sheepish smile, he acknowledged the depth of the problem thus summarized.

Let me share another similar example from closer to home. Some years ago, a young man from a small town in northeastern Michigan came to Western and earned an undergraduate degree. At some point soon after graduation, the dean and the student met, and the dean inquired about the young man’s job search.

The new graduate responded, “Well, I have a job offer from a company in Grand Rapids, but I don’t think I’ll take it because Grand Rapids is a rather large city and besides its more than 2 hours from home.”

The dean went on to tell me that after some persuasion, the young man did accept the position. And after only a few weeks on the job, the boss handed his new employee and airline ticket, saying, “Young man, you are on your way to Beijing (China). And, . . . Oh by the way, you are not coming home for 3 years.”

As I asked the director of international programs in the first story, I now ask you, the faculty of Western Michigan University, “Did you prepare this young man to go to Beijing? And if—as I assume—you did not, may I ask why not? But what if the boss had sent our hapless young man to Moscow, or Rio or Kuala Lumpur? Did you prepare him for those places as well?”

If the answer to any of these is “NO,” then in my view you have failed to prepare this Western graduate to face this globalized 21st century.

These are good stories, not because we should be proud of their implications for our educational programs, but frankly because they illustrate problems that have

been common to American higher education for decades, if not centuries. We all know too well the stories and jokes that illustrate cultural and global illiteracy among Americans, which include a statement by one Senator at the 1946 inauguration of the Fulbright program indicating that had he known the educational exchange rider was attached to the larger bill, he would have tried to kill it immediately because he “didn’t want our impressionable American youths to be infected with foreign ‘isms.’”ⁱ

And why should we be more concerned now than we have been for these past decades? Does not our American university system fairly cry out by saying, “We have been turning out globally illiterate students for more than 200 years, and the U.S. seems to be doing pretty well, thank you!”

In the years since the fearful experience of September 11, 2001, many meanings have been attached to it. Not the least, of course, some identify it the outset of a “war” on terrorism. Let me, however, suggest a simpler but little noted meaning for that experience. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, we must at last recognize that those two great oceans—the Atlantic and Pacific—which for more than two centuries insulated us from the vagaries and violence of much of the rest of the world can no longer do so. The world is upon us—and the best and worst of it can be here in a matter of hours; or as realistically, may already be among us.

The unintended consequence of geography that once allowed Americans to live—and universities to teach—in the happy bliss of global ignorance no longer offers us such comforting and protective insulation.

Our responsibilities as educators demand that we redress this failure—this willing propensity to perpetuate global ignorance. Not just for those students who may be able to afford a term in study abroad, but for every student—missing none and allowing for no exceptions.

All of our students must have the tools to know and judge the world around them, whether they exercise those judgments in conjunction with business or other assignments abroad, whether they continue within the academy to study the great issues that globalization raises, or whether they simply venture into the voting booth in Kalamazoo or New York City or anywhere in between.

Friends and colleagues; members of this distinguished faculty Senate, there is only one way that we can assure that our students—all of our students—meet this test.

However romantic it may sound, our community of scholars, which is to say the faculty of our great university, must become a global community—a community with a shared, global outlook such that we teach in every course, every day from that global perspective.

This Senate and every faculty member represented herein will play an important role in reexamining our community—and what we teach. No amount of study abroad or even individual faculty member's efforts abroad will successfully solve our problem. We can only resolve this very longstanding failure by returning to that romantic notion of a community of scholars acting, thinking, researching and teaching in our typically dissonant unity about the critical elements that compose our contemporary, global world and the responsibilities that our students will have for the future of that world.

Thank you so very much for inviting me to speak with you today.

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ⁱ Haynes Johnson and Bernard Gwertzman, *Fulbright the Dissenter* (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 112.

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