

Internationalization in the College of Social Sciences: Theorizing contemporary global processes and their relationship to regional and local processes

Draft report prepared by Laurie Medina, November 2004

The College of Social Sciences is committed to broadening students' awareness of the interconnectedness of local and international events and issues. All departments and professional schools in the College of Social Sciences engage in some research, teaching, or outreach that is international in scope, and several departments have made international work a primary focus. These departments prioritize research, teaching, and outreach efforts that theorize and explain contemporary global processes and their relationship to regional and local processes. Thus, the work of faculty in the College addresses the question of how and why "internationalization" and international processes have changed over recent decades -- from MSU's 'Hannah years' to the present -- in the context of globalization.

Indeed, the College's research and teaching on globalization involves not only faculty who conduct research abroad, but also faculty whose research is focused on the U.S. In the past "internationalization" was conceptualized largely in terms of people coming to MSU from abroad or MSU faculty and students traveling to foreign countries; however, the work of faculty in the College of Social Sciences explores how the rapid movement of capital, commodities, technologies, and ideas across national boundaries makes even those Michigan residents who may never leave home increasingly subject to international or global forces.

Further, the process of knowledge creation itself in the social sciences has become increasingly international. More and more faculty research projects involve collaboration with colleagues in other countries.

Units in the College of Social Sciences

The College houses twelve major disciplines: Anthropology, Criminal Justice, Economics, Geography, History, Integrative Studies in Social Sciences, Labor and Industrial Relations, Political Science, Psychology, Social Work, Sociology, and Urban and Regional Planning. The College also includes several centers and institutes: the Center for the Advanced Study of International Development, the Center for Global Change and Earth Observation, the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research, the Julian Samora Research Institute, and MATRIX: The Center for Humane Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences Online. Faculty in each of these units are involved in research, teaching, or outreach that is international in reach, though the number of faculty and the degree to which they engage in international work varies.

Since only a portion of the international work currently underway in the College can be summarized in this brief report, primary emphasis is given to work that theorizes contemporary global processes and their relationship to regional and local processes. The rationale for this focus is that this work constitutes an important contribution the College

of Social Sciences offers the MSU community as a whole, and the College of Social Sciences is the primary locus for such theorizing.

International research: linking global, regional, and local processes

A great deal of research conducted by Social Science faculty aims to identify and explain links between processes and events that occur at different scales: local, national, regional, and global. Most of the following examples of such research initiatives integrate research, teaching, and policy/outreach objectives, though later sections on teaching and outreach expand these dimensions of international work in the college. Most of the projects used as examples below have been funded by external grants, an indicator that the issues and questions they address are deemed significant by a wider community of scholars and policy makers.

Anthropology

All four programs (Archaeology, Forensic Anthropology, Medical Anthropology, and Culture, Resources, and Power) in the Department of Anthropology involve research and teaching that is international in scope. The Culture, Resources, and Power (CRP) program focuses specifically on contemporary processes of globalization. The CRP program involves most socio-cultural and linguistic anthropology faculty. CRP members conduct research on six interrelated thematic areas: local, national, and transnational identities; political ecology and sustainability; economic development and social policy; social justice and human rights; language, discourse, and power; and the production of knowledge. CRP faculty situate their research on these themes within contemporary processes of globalization, examining the intersections of global and local forces and the new practices and politics that emerge at those intersections. For example, several CRP faculty study how neoliberal economic reforms negotiated in global arenas affect local and national policies regarding resource management and access to resources. Others explore how human rights or indigenous rights discourses elaborated in global forums are deployed in local and national level struggles over rights and resources.

Most courses taught by Culture, Resources, and Power members are international and comparative; they focus on the intersection of global and local processes across the six CRP themes. CRP recently revised both graduate and undergraduate anthropology curricula, dropping some older courses and introducing new courses that address contemporary issues and place those issues in the context of current processes of globalization. The CRP program recently was awarded a five-year grant from the National Science Foundation to train graduate students in the conceptual and methodological frameworks required to conduct research that can account for the range of forces -- global, national, and local -- that shape human interactions in specific locations.

Center for Global Change and Earth Observation

The Center for Global Change and Earth Observation (formerly the Basic Science and Remote Sensing Initiative) is an interdisciplinary research center sponsored by the Colleges of Social Science, Natural Science, and Agriculture and Natural Resources. It focuses on the study of patterns and processes of global environmental change, from

global to local scales. The goal of the Center is to strengthen interdisciplinary approaches for understanding global change at all scales using the tools of both the social and physical sciences. The Center conducts research focused on the human drivers of global environmental change. Taking a “pattern to process” approach, Earth observing systems detect the patterns of change, while field studies, models, and other methods assess the processes that create these patterns of change. Subsequent integration of information on patterns and processes is used to produce predictive models that can forecast future land use and cover change and thus inform policy decisions.

Economics

Many economics faculty members conduct research that is international in scope, especially in the fields of trade, finance, tax policy, labor markets, and post-socialist economic reorganization. A majority of economics courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels are also international in their content. Beyond faculty members’ individual efforts, the department has recently taken the lead in implementing an interdisciplinary Initiative for the Study of Political Activity Related to Trade Issues (SPARTI) that will bring together an intellectual community of economists, political scientists, legal scholars and others dedicated to exploring the complexities of international trade policy. SPARTI will sponsor events such as lectures by professionals engaged in the development of trade policy, seminars with scholars from around the world who study trade issues, and conferences that would bring together both researchers and policy practitioners to address a theme. The project aims to create a working paper series on trade issues, establish an interdisciplinary undergraduate course on globalization, increase awareness within the MSU community of key issues in globalization, and provide service to the business community affected by globalization. Thus, the initiative involves teaching, research, and outreach components.

Geography

A majority of courses in the Department of Geography are focused internationally, and numerous faculty are engaged in research that explores the relationships among processes that unfold at different scales. Much of this work is summarized in the phrase “pattern to process,” which refers to efforts to understand the processes through which patterns (often of large scale) are generated. For example, a team of researchers from MSU geography led by PI David Campbell recently received a 5-year NSF grant to fund the Climate Land Interaction Project that is examining the interaction between land use change, land cover change, and climate change at the regional scale in East Africa. The project will develop a regional model of the interactions between land use change and climate change that will provide more accurate assessment of probable future trends in precipitation and temperature than the projections afforded by models of global scale. Thus, the project has significant policy implications for farmers and herders in East African countries. Reflecting a common trend in social science research, this project involves collaboration between MSU researchers and scholars from the United Kingdom, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, as well as other US universities.

Political Science

The “Afrobarometer” project under the direction of Michael Bratton and Carolyn Logan in the Department of Political Science measures the social, political, and economic atmosphere in Africa. One significant aim of the project is to gauge citizens’ understandings of democratization processes underway in a range of African countries. Afrobarometer surveys are conducted in more than a dozen African countries and are repeated on a regular cycle. Because the instrument asks a standard set of questions, countries can be systematically compared. Trends in public attitudes are tracked over time. Results are shared with decision makers, policy advocates, civic educators, journalists, researchers, donors and investors, and Africans who wish to become more informed and active citizens. The project partners MSU researchers with researchers from the Center for Democratic Development in Ghana and the Institute for Democracy in South Africa.

Sociology

The Department of Sociology recently voted to make “Global Transformations” its overarching theme for research and teaching. This theme cuts across the department’s four focus areas in 1) Gender and Family, 2) Health and Well-being, 3) Food, Environment, Agriculture, Science and Technology, and 4) Urban, Migration and Race. In their research, Sociology faculty look comparatively at social, political, and cultural differences, and they explore how the global context accounts for social processes, change, and inequality. To reflect its new theme, the department initiated a graduate seminar on Global Transformations that is now required for all entering graduate students. Sociology also plans to restructure its curriculum to reflect its focus on global processes and forces, including the addition of an undergraduate capstone course on global transformation and society.

The Global Transformations theme is illustrated in the research conducted by the Institute for Food and Agricultural Standards (IFAS), an interdisciplinary teaching, research, and policy analysis institute led by sociologist Larry Busch. The definition and imposition of grades and standards have become an increasingly important factor in global trade and economic development, and IFAS focuses on the social, economic, political and ethical aspects of grade and standards creation, enforcement and review. IFAS aims to understand how science and technology are linked to the creation of agricultural grades and standards; identify ethical and value issues raised by the imposition of grades and standards; examine the sociopolitical dynamics surrounding the development of agricultural grades and standards; and contribute to making the process of standards setting and enforcement more accountable, transparent, and democratic. An outreach component of this program, Partnerships for Food Industry Development – Fruit and Vegetables (PFID – FV), facilitates linkages between retailers/processors in industrialized nations and producers/exporters in developing nations in order to expand produce markets, reduce transaction costs and risks, and help producers and exporters to meet the requirements of retailers with respect to quality, safety, timing, varieties, and volumes of produce. The project aims to improve the quality and safety of fruits and vegetables worldwide, while raising the incomes of smallholder agricultural producers in developing countries.

International focus in teaching

Courses

As the above examples suggest, in Social Science departments that have prioritized theorizing and teaching about processes of globalization and global-local linkages, a majority of courses are international in scope. However, all departments offer some courses with international content.

Specializations and Interdisciplinary Majors

In addition, the College sponsors interdisciplinary majors and specializations that are international. The Center for the Advanced Study of International Development (CASID), a unit in the College of Social Sciences, offers specializations in International Development at both undergraduate and graduate levels. The College also participates in the Peace and Justice Studies specialization, offering key courses. Undergraduate interdisciplinary studies majors with an international focus are also offered by the College, including one in International Studies and one in Public Policy Studies that explores social, political, and economic policies established at local, state, national, and international levels. At the graduate level, the College partners with Agriculture and Natural Resources to support the Gender, Justice, and Environmental Change specialization, which incorporates international content.

Study abroad

The College of Social Sciences has a longstanding commitment to international study and offers a wide range of opportunities for students to participate in a study abroad experience. Currently the College has over 40 study abroad programs that cross five continents. Several additional programs are in the proposal stage. During 2003-04, the College's participation rate in study abroad programs was higher than all other colleges, at 18.3%. Study abroad programs offered by the College emphasize analysis of issues relating to political and economic systems in diverse cultures, global conflict and cooperation, adaptation to change, and the nature of differences in cultures and societies. Students participating in study abroad experiences gain concrete skills in intercultural communication, nation-specific knowledge, and an awareness of both self and others in the global context of the 21st century world.

International outreach/engagement

Many international research projects in the College have outreach or policy components, as the examples provided above demonstrate. In addition, SSC faculty serve as advisors to global organizations such as The World Bank and the United Nations Environmental Program; US government agencies such as the US Agency for International Development; and government agencies in countries such as Korea, Thailand, Norway and Australia.

Some units, such as the Center for the Advanced Study of International Development (CASID), have prioritized outreach focused on international issues as a core responsibility, required as a condition of its Title VI funding. CASID interprets "international development" as a process which goes beyond the stereotypical confines of

agricultural research, involving issues of hunger, poverty, the global economy, the environment and its use and misuse, ethnicity and gender concerns, access to education and medical assistance, and social justice. Thus, outreach activities organized by the Center focus on development issues, broadly defined. They include workshops for K-12 teachers on international development issues and in-services with school districts in Michigan. At the post-secondary level CASID provides support to community colleges in Michigan to internationalize their institutions through the Michigan International Education Outreach Network (MIDEON), a consortium of twenty-two Michigan institutions of higher education that emerged through a series of International Development Summer Institutes sponsored by CASID.

CASID also administers professional education and training programs that serve participants from developing countries. These capacity-building programs provide representatives from government agencies, non-governmental organizations and other institutions opportunities to acquire expertise and develop leadership skills in a variety of programming areas including: Local Democratic Governance, Citizen Participation, Economic Development, Civic Education Community/NGO Development, Reinventing Government, Intergovernmental Relations, and the Rule of Law. Programs have ranged from one-week professional exchanges to yearlong advanced degree and certificate programs. All provide opportunities for developing country professionals to interact with their U.S. counterparts, to acquire and exchange information freely, and to gain a greater understanding of the cultural and political influences in U.S. society. They have also afforded opportunities for U.S. government, business and academic professionals to travel to developing countries to not only share their expertise, but to increase their knowledge and gain an appreciation for the countries visited.

Challenges for the Future

Faculty and staff within the College of Social Sciences who seek to further research and teaching on issues of international scope and to increase study abroad participation have identified an array of challenges that must be addressed in order to accomplish these goals.

Study Abroad

There are two types of study abroad programs: MSU faculty-led and direct enrollment. MSU faculty-led tend to be more attractive to first-time travelers, because the leadership of MSU faculty makes them feel safer and more familiar than direct enrollment programs. However, the number of such programs is limited by the number of faculty who work internationally, and the lack of incentives/rewards provided to encourage faculty who work internationally to develop study abroad programs. As a result, most recent growth in study abroad offerings has been in direct enrollment programs. However, reliance on direct enrollment programs has generated some disincentives for student participation in study abroad. Some of those disincentives, such

as the issue of how direct enrollment courses will be transcribed, are currently being addressed. An issue that remains to be addressed is the grades MSU students earn in direct enrollment programs: they often perform less well than their counterparts from the countries in which they are studying. In order to meet MSU's ambitious goals regarding undergraduate participation in study abroad programs, either the problems associated with direct enrollment programs must be resolved, or MSU will have to recruit greater numbers of faculty who work internationally and provide greater incentives to them to create study abroad programs.

Funding for international collaborative work

Research on international or global issues increasingly involves MSU faculty in collaborative efforts with researchers from other countries. This reflects a number of trends, from the increased ease of international communication to the priorities of granting agencies. While established research partnerships can be sustained largely through electronic communications, the initiation of such relationships requires face-to-face interaction to generate the shared understandings and mutual confidence required to carry out a successful research project. Funds are currently lacking to cover these start-up costs of international collaborative research projects. The trend towards international collaborative research has also made MSU faculty participation in international conferences more imperative, and funds for this type of activity are also insufficient.

Inflexibility in academic calendar

A further obstacle to international research is the inflexibility of the academic calendar. Although steps have been taken to make it possible for faculty to offer intensive courses of shorter (less than a full semester) duration, at present not enough of these courses are being offered to make the option feasible for students. As a result, the option is not seen as economically feasible for departments either, as their enrollments would drop.