

## Developing Global Citizenship: Introducing a Teaching Toolkit

Henrike Lehnguth • University of Maryland, College Park • lehnguth@umd.edu

Jenny Wüstenberg • University of Maryland, College Park • jwustenberg@gvpt.umd.edu

Ask any college teacher about the global awareness and knowledge displayed by his or her undergraduates and you will likely receive a response rife with frustration. A common concern is that American undergraduates tend to display little knowledge, or even curiosity, about “the world out there.” At the same time, the social, economic, and political changes that are collectively termed “globalization” necessitate that our students develop new skills and competences in order to succeed. “Global learning” is the new buzzword that points to the significance of conceptually engaging our rising global interdependence in higher education. We view self-reflective, critical skills in intercultural communication as key to acquiring effective global competence.

In order to address these concerns with students on our home turf at the University of Maryland, we developed a toolkit for “Teaching the United States in a Global Context.” In this essay, we want to introduce our classroom exercises (which can be requested from us by email from anyone who is interested in using them). Of course, feedback and new additions are more than welcome! We also want to highlight the theoretical and cultural context in which these tools were developed because we feel that it offers an explanation to American readers of how international graduate assistants and faculty approach American undergraduates.

### Approaches to Intercultural Awareness Training

The toolkit—and our cooperation more generally—developed out of a discussion the two of us had about our experiences of teaching American undergraduates about American culture and politics and about the United States’ role in the world. Both of us are currently international graduate students at the University of Maryland: Henrike Lehnguth in American Studies and Jenny Wüstenberg in Government & Politics. American Studies interrogates how people make meaning in the cultures of everyday life and traces identity formations. Central to American Studies is the acknowledgement that “America” embodies a multitude of contested meanings that move conceptually far beyond rigid nation-state borders.<sup>1</sup> Global competences are, in other words, central to cutting-edge American Studies scholarship. In Political Science, concerns about

post-9/11 causes of conflict and the often conjured “clash of civilizations” has given the study of culture a more urgent flavor. Simultaneously, recent innovations in the study of political culture<sup>2</sup> mean that political scientists are now interested in the power relationships embedded in and perpetuated by cultural practices and symbols, rather than merely regarding it as a variable which can distort quantitative surveys. Therefore, a sophisticated understanding of global cultural processes has become pivotal to a comprehensive political science education.

In debating these issues as they emerge in our respective fields, we noted our frustration with the lack of knowledge and curiosity most students displayed about the rest of the world. Students lacked familiarity with effective (self)critical practices; and therefore often referred to one-dimensional clichés such as that America is “the best” and a role model for what other countries should aspire to. We began thinking about how to encourage students to develop skills that would encourage a differentiated understanding of their embeddedness in culture and their relationship with others. Because we viewed intercultural communication as central to global learning, we decided to examine ideas on intercultural competence training and found a wealth of material—both in English and in German (where we are both intellectually at home). However, we noticed that basic notions of culture underlying these training manuals were different.

During the 1960s and 1970s in Germany, an unprecedented number of immigrants—mainly from Turkey and other southern European states—arrived in the context of the so-called “guest worker program,” under which migrants were expected to fill important gaps in the labor market as long as needed and then return to the country from which they came. Of course this did not happen, and most guest workers brought their families and settled long-term. German citizenship laws were until recently highly restrictive, making it very difficult for immigrants, and even the second and third generations, to become naturalized. The German materials on intercultural training are very much a product of the realization of social workers and teachers that they had to deal with the new cultural diversity.

The first phase in this new “foreigners’ social work” was targeted at the immigrants exclusively and aimed at facilitating their integration into (a supposedly unchanging) German society.<sup>3</sup> In this context, social workers and pedagogues were informed about the ‘other’ cultures, and taught to be sensitive to customs and gender roles. This had the effect of promoting an essentialized and stereotypical understanding of *the Turks, the Italians* etc. Furthermore, with the diversification of countries of origin of migrants, the task to learn about all the places clients or students came from, became unfeasible. Emerging from this “foreigners’ social work,” one educational approach has been to break down differences between Germans and immigrants by fostering cultural exchange and making the foreign familiar. This approach, of course, does not actually promote competence in dealing with foreignness—it merely eliminates foreignness in a particular relationship or situation. Thus, the more recent literature tries to promote an understanding of what it means to be foreign and how to deal with situations which and persons who evoke feelings of foreignness. Put differently, the new German approach in intercultural training is to develop the social skills needed to master intercultural encounters as they arise.

This approach is indeed a great improvement upon previous ones. However, in analyzing German training exercises, we found a common tendency to essentialize German and other national cultures and use them to exemplify cultural difference in general. For example, exercises often will divide a group into bi-cultural (by which is meant German and non-German) pairs, or multi-national groups in order to discuss differences in language, cultural heritage, communication styles, and so forth. While this method is certainly useful when the group perceives these differences as meaningful, German training does not usually question the assumptions about the determinants of cultural identity which are implicit in such divisions. Further, these exercises do not generally call attention to cultural difference within “nationality” such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, disability, or personal background. Here, we think German intercultural trainers can learn from the American approach.

In our experience most U.S. students and colleagues imagine “cultural difference” as diversity within the United States. So, unlike in the German *inter-cultural* awareness model that conceives German culture as monolithic vis-à-vis other national cultures, the American model acknowledges difference *within* the nation. However, the

United States is not considered in its relationship to other countries. Here the U.S. is presented as the only reference point to an “intercultural awareness.” This may fail to prepare students as global citizens who can conceive of culture beyond internal diversity. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall points out, “culture is the way we make sense, give meaning to the world.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, one significant way in which Americans make sense of the world is as *Americans*.

The importance of highlighting national culture despite internal diversity is best captured in Sonia Nieto’s *Language, Culture, and Teaching*, where she uses her personal experience as an example:

Even though I was born in this country and have spent my entire life here, even though I was formed and educated and lead a productive professional life in the United States, when I am asked the inevitable question, “What are you?” I always answer “Puerto Rican.” Why is it that for me being an American seems inherently to conflict with being a Puerto Rican? Ironically, I myself recognize that I am in some ways undeniably American; that is, my experience, tastes, and even values immediately define me to most onlookers as “American,” albeit with a deep connection to my Puerto Rican heritage. Several years ago, I was jarred speaking with an island-born Puerto Rican who commented that he could tell at first glance that I was born and raised in the United States simply by looking at my body language.<sup>5</sup>

Our toolkit aspires to combine this awareness of diversity within the United States with the recognition of the still prevalent nation-state identity. We hope to instill in students the idea that they are global citizens on an equal footing with other global citizens and that this entails a shared responsibility for the world. To this end, raising awareness about dominant perceptions of Americans and the United States in the world (whether accurate or not) and their role in global relationships is pivotal. More practically, we hope our ideas will help international faculty and graduate teaching assistants with diverse cultural backgrounds to maneuver the cultural clash experienced when teaching American undergraduates, as well as American instructors who wish to foster global citizenship.

### The Toolkit

We have approached global learning through the lens of intercultural awareness. We realize, however, that there are multiple ways of bringing global learning and/or intercultural—American/non-American—awareness into classrooms: for instance, through research projects that students engage in over the semester.

Our toolkit includes classroom exercises adapted and developed from intercultural awareness training manuals, as well as ones that emerged from our teaching at the University of Maryland. It kicks off with a few icebreakers, intended both for students to get to know each other and to introduce the subject of intercultural communication. They call attention to students' migratory background and sensitize them to the concept of the cultural specificity of greeting customs. Especially with new groups, we recommend using such exercises to ease into a subject that can at times be quite sensitive, particularly for students of ethnic minority background.

We include in the toolkit one activity which is expressively self-reflective: we suggest questions to be used on a questionnaire which encourages students to think intensively about their own cultural assumptions and identity and then discuss these, first in small groups, then with the whole class. This exercise works well prior to any of the more interactive and simulation-based ones, because it enables the instructor to compare students' early perceptions with insights emerging from later discussions, thus contributing to self-critical learning outcomes.

The majority of activities in our toolkit is organized around group work or simulations involving the entire group. One problematizes the latent prejudices class members hold ("Warrant"), two others simulate situations in which students are exposed to foreignness and cultural dissonance ("Minorities in Discussion" and "Card Tournament"). These tend to trigger discussions about what it means to be an "outsider" in a social situation, how foreigners feel in the United States, and how a social setting can consciously be made more welcoming and accommodating to difference. Simulations, in our experience, are especially instructive because the students have fun while developing their own analysis without significant prompting from the instructor.

A final set of exercises explicitly addresses the image and role of Americans in the world ("Representative American" and "Statements by Foreigners"). In one, students are asked to visually or theatrically represent what they view as "representative" and then think about how their simplified image impacts relationships with other cultures. We ask them to interrogate how they situate themselves vis-à-vis this simplified version of American culture and how such impressions are constructed. In another, we have collected statements about U.S. culture made by foreigners who have lived in the United States for extended periods. We

found that these provoke controversial and fruitful debates about American culture and misperceptions of "outsiders" and "insiders" alike.

Our toolkit suggests ideal group sizes and time needed to conduct exercises, as well as what is required in preparation. Further, we point out how activities can be fruitfully combined to achieve a more nuanced reflection on issues of cultural embeddedness, intercultural communication, and global responsibility. We would gladly share the toolkit with anyone interested in testing it. We welcome any feedback and ideas for improvement and extension. **PSE**

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Janice Radway, "What's in a Name? Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, 20 November 1998," *American Quarterly* Vol. 51, No. 1 (March 1999): 1-32; Amy Kaplan, "Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, Hartford, Connecticut, October 17, 2003," *American Quarterly* Vol. 56, No. 1 (March 2004): 1-18.; and Shelley Fisher Fiskkin, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004," *American Quarterly* Vol. 57, No.1 (March 2005): 17-57.

<sup>2</sup> See Lisa Wedeen, "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 96/4 (2002). Marc Howard Ross, "Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis," in *Comparative Politics—Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, edited by M. I. Lichbach and A. S. Zuckerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and George Steinmetz, ed. *State/Culture—State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Gudrun Jakubeit and Karl Schattenhofer, "Fremdheitskompetenz—Ein Weg zum aktiven Neben- und Miteinander von Deutschen und Fremden," *Neue Praxis* 5 (1996):389-408.

<sup>4</sup> *Stuart Hall: Representation and the Media*, directed by Sut Jhally, (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Sonia Nieto, *Language, Culture, and Teaching: Critical Perspectives for a New Century* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 2002): 104.

## EXERCISE: A REPRESENTATIVE AMERICAN

### Description

In this exercise, participants are asked to divide into small groups and draw a representative American. Their results are then presented to the whole class and compared with each other. This exercise is meant to encourage students to reflect on their embeddedness in American culture.

Ask the students to divide up into groups of 4 or 5. Distribute materials and remember to ask them to take notes and designate a presenter. Instruct them first, to brainstorm about what characteristics are representative of American culture—they can be positive and negative. Second, they are to discuss and agree which five characteristics are most important. They then draw an American representing those characteristics. Encourage them to be creative. (20-25 minutes for group work).

Gather the entire class and have group leaders present their posters. Ask presenters (or another group member) to remain at the front holding their poster to facilitate comparison between them. Here are some suggestions to stimulate discussion:

- Depending on the nature of the posters, problematize differences and overlaps between them.
- Would other Americans agree with your portrayal of what is representative? (Here, you should take into account the make-up of your class—is there diversity of class, race, religion, gender, regional origin?)
- While selecting positive and negative “representative” characteristics of Americans, what did you use as a reference to determine what is “representative” and what is “American”?
- What are the cultural assumptions behind your own assessment of American characteristics?
- Where do you locate yourselves (as a group or as individuals) within these statements? Do these statements correspond to your idea of the United States AND your own identity? Which statements correspond to your idea of the U.S. but NOT your identity?
- Whose definition of “American” is most trustworthy and why?
- What’s your stake/how important is it to you to be seen in a certain way as an American? What does this mean for the U.S. role in the world and for those studying international affairs (foreigner’s views, our awareness of their views, can we find common ground)?

Time: At least 50 Minutes

Group size: At least 10

Materials: Large sheets of paper and colored markers

Option: Instead of drawing, have students prepare a skit or pantomime representing an American. With sufficient time, this exercise can fruitfully be combined with “Statements by Foreigners.”

Source: Adapted from Helga Losche. *Interkulturelle Kommunikation: Sammlung Praktischer Spiele Und Übungen*. (Alling: Sandmann Verlag, 1995).

## CALL FOR ARTICLES

For upcoming issues of *The Political Science Educator* we are currently seeking the following features:

- Debates between members on pertinent topics
- “Lessons Learned”—a continuing column on how the teaching of participants in the Teaching and Learning Conferences has evolved as a result of the TLC (approximately 500-1000 words)
- Feature articles that are “think pieces” about teaching and the discipline, discussions of teaching experiences and approaches, or preliminary research under development (@ 1000 words)
- “Teaching tips” and suggestions—including approaches and experiments that have been less successful
- “The New Professor”—essays designed to help graduate students and new faculty who are navigating the job market and early years of careers at undergraduate institutions
- “Research and Resources: The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning”—a column including literature reviews on specific topics, research notes, examination of new research threads
- “Technology and the Professor”—a column examining current options available for the classroom and classroom management, including resources available on the web

Items for the “Notables” and “Announcements” sections.

The deadline for the next issue is March 15. If you are interested in submitting an article, essay, or announcement (or a suggestion for other items to be included in the newsletter), please contact:

**Michelle D. Deardorff, Editor**  
*The Political Science Educator*  
 Jackson State University  
[michelle.d.deardorff@jsums.edu](mailto:michelle.d.deardorff@jsums.edu)