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TEACHING NOTE

Four Pillars in Understanding Globalization: How I Teach Second Year Seminar

Fang Deng

The end of the twentieth century saw the beginning of a new era of globalization. Economic integration, advances in technology, and global transport networks have forged a “global village.” As the world changes, we also need to change—in both our knowledge and our perspective. Literacy in the twenty-first century is no longer limited to conventional, text-based reading competency—it also includes technology and media applications and extends to intercultural realms of knowledge.

In 2006, I developed a writing-intensive Second Year Seminar, “Globalization: Cultural Conflict and Integration,” as part of Bridgewater State’s new core curriculum offerings, and have taught it since 2007. It has been very well received by students; for four years, two sections of the course have been offered every semester and student enrollment is consistently high. The course is designed to inform students about the new era of globalization and encourage them to become globally literate and responsible citizens.

Teaching this course is immensely gratifying to me because it involves innovation. What I enjoy most is the challenge posed by the fact that 95% of students in my class are 19 years old

and have never been abroad or had the opportunity to study other cultures—some have never even watched foreign movies. So I am challenged to find ways to teach them about globalization and provide them with new and diverse perspectives of the world.

I have met this challenge by creating a three-step process. First, I encourage students to candidly express their opinions on globalization, and then I post their varied opinions on PowerPoint to share how they feel about the changing world. Second, I expose them to some important global events and ask them to explain their opinions on globalization, based on the facts they learn. Finally, I have designed a building that symbolizes our understanding of globalization.

It stands on four foundations, or pillars: *awareness, embrace, independent thinking, and integration*. Throughout the semester I lead students in building these four pillars of understanding in class assignments and discussions.

First Pillar: Awareness—Going Outside the Box

Many students who take this class are unaware of the changing world. It seems that they live “in the box,” and do not realize that the world has become a different place. Students articulate this perspective when they write comments such as: “While I had known about jobs being lost in the U.S. due to outsourcing, my knowledge on globalization was very vague and uninformed;” “While the world is rapidly changing and cultures are becoming more intertwined, in general most Americans are far behind when it comes to globalizing themselves. I am no different;” and “Until I came to this class, I was unaware of the meaning of globalization.”



Awareness, the first pillar of understanding globalization, results from an exposure to global trends. In my class, our exposure focuses on economic zones, especially BRIC, the emerging and fast-growing markets of Brazil, Russia, India, and China. Three regions—the U.S. (with 22% share of the world economy); Euro Zone (with 18%); and emerging markets (led by China, with 20%)—are the three legs of the stool that

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constitutes the global economy. These statistics show that a superpower can no longer exist without the assistance and collaboration of other nations. For instance, although Apple symbolizes the best of American big business—its innovative drive, its flair for style, and its advertising acumen—it has only succeeded because of its deep relationship with China, where nearly all of its products are assembled by workers who are paid on average \$260/month. In addition, about 20% of Apple’s global sales revenues come from China. In short, isolated domestic markets simply do not exist anymore.



Terrace farming, Qinkuo, Yunnan, China

By exposing students to global Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) they also become more aware of globalization. In one documentary film, *1-800-India*, students witness the power of digital technology that has made global BPO boom within a single decade, from an industry with no profits to an industry with a trillion dollars in profits. Students’ responses to the documentary have been very strong and impressive: “Through watching *1-800-India*, you can see globalization coming to life right before your eyes;” “The movie *1-800-India* was a very insightful movie.

Some students had difficulty understanding the impact of globalization while they were just beginning to become aware of it. One student wrote: “Globalization doesn’t have any effects on me because I will be a teacher, and that job cannot be taken by a laborer in China or India.” I brought this student’s opinion into class and encouraged students to discuss how the globally integrating labor market has changed the American employment structure. In the discussion that ensued, students

learned from this discussion that it is impossible to understand the world we now live in without understanding globalization and its consequences.

Second Pillar: Embrace—Accepting Globalization as the Direction in which the World is Moving

Becoming aware of globalization and its effects on all societies divides the students. Two different attitudes emerge. When asked how they felt about China’s rise and the issue of globalization, the majority embrace the changing world. They have written in their papers: “With the unparalleled surge of technology the world has now become a much smaller, more closely knit community. Countries must now learn to cooperate and build relationships more than ever before in human history;” “If the world is globalized, we must globalize ourselves;” “The key to globalizing yourself is to not challenge change, but to accept it.”

On the other hand, some students used the words “weird,” “scared,” and “unwanted changes” to describe their feelings. For example, one wrote: “It makes me feel a little unsettled to hear

“Until I came to this class,
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of globalization.”

After watching this movie I believe that in order to globalize myself and prepare for the new world, education and diversity are the key;” “I look at globalizing myself as a way of going outside the box; straying away from the norms we are used to and interacting with the world.”

argued and gradually came to realize that globalization will impact their future careers for two reasons: first, competition for jobs like teachers and police officers is increasing because no one wants a job that can be easily outsourced; and second, as more people compete for jobs like teaching and police work, the income growth in these jobs decreases. Students

that other countries, which were once greatly inferior economically, are now coming into the global spotlight.” Another student challenged globalization: “Do we have to globalize at all? I don’t feel it’s necessary.” Another student commented: “Other countries are accepting us but we have trouble to accept them.”

Although students had differing degrees of embrace (or acceptance) of globalization, all of the students agreed that it was digital technology that made globally integrated markets profitable, at the same time it threatens American jobs. If we don’t accept globalization, could we alter the trend and go back to the old days?

To address this issue, I have students study the history of the relationship between the invention of new technology and social change. For example, as the invention of the steam engine helped create industrial society in the eighteenth century, computer chips transformed our society in the twentieth century, and digital technology has brought our society into the

information age. The invention of new technology has been the driving force of social change, and we cannot fight that historical trend. These students can either have unrealistic dreams (i.e., to go back to the old days), or accept and prepare themselves for the reality of globalization. Almost all of the students agree that we must embrace globalization.

familiar with other parts of the world, American media (and the influence of Western ideology generally) create obstacles. No one can think independently when he or she is under the influence or control of ideology—and the inability to think independently makes it impossible for students to understand the changing world. In our class, for instance, students constantly

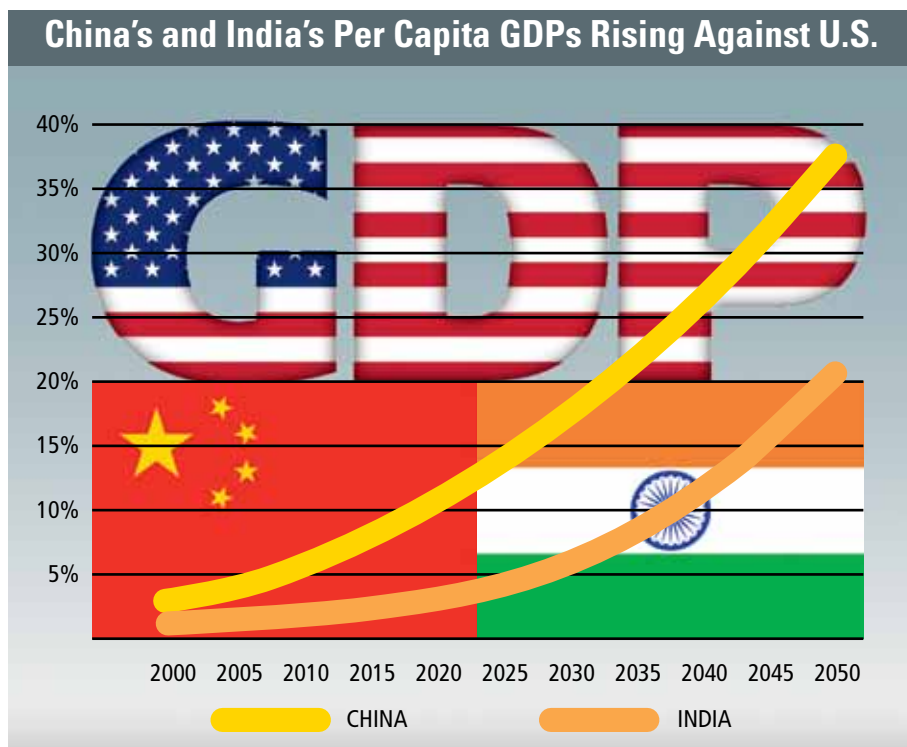
“Countries must now learn to cooperate and build relationships more than ever before in human history.”

Third Pillar: Thinking Independently—Getting Rid of the Influence of Ideology

How we globalize ourselves is a challenge that all students face. Although the majority indicate a strong desire to broaden their horizons and become

deny the implications of the rise of BRIC, because economic and social developments in these four countries pose major challenges to Western perspectives and undermine the West’s deepest assumptions.

In another documentary film, *Mardi Gras: Made in China*, students witness a process of globalization: Mardi Gras beads are made in China and sold in the U.S. The owner of the factory is a Canadian-Chinese, the workers are young Chinese laborers, and the customers American shoppers at Wal-Mart and Kmart. The American director of the documentary interviewed many Chinese workers, who presented their views on the factory where they worked, their work environment, their pay, their lives, and globalization. Although the documentary focuses on a single factory built at the beginning of the 1990s, it symbolizes the way that China has transformed itself, in only 30 years, from one of the poorest countries in the world to the second greatest economic power.



After watching the documentary, students are hard pressed to understand the economic boom in China and its implications for the world. At the same time, all of them were shocked by the hard work done by the young Chinese laborers, the tough factory regulations, and workers' living conditions, which were radically different from those of American factory workers. More specifically, students were shocked by the striking contrast between their own perspectives and Chinese views, as Table 1 shows.

Why were their opinions so diverse? Students bring an emotional framework and a mindset formed by Western ideology. For them, the world consists of only two major forms of societies:

a) democratic societies based on a successful economy, with freedom and human rights as important principles; and b) non-democratic societies based on authoritarianism (such as Communist regimes) in which people suffer from poverty and deprivation of political freedom.

China's successful economic development within the context of a Communist regime does not fit

into the students' framework, and confuses them. Instead of understanding China's economic development, BSU students criticize sweatshops and question the reliability of Chinese workers' positive opinions about their lives. My students neither accept Chinese perspectives nor believe that Chinese workers could have opinions that differ from Western perspectives.

of cooking oil, and fifteen pounds of meat annually—and the markets lacked virtually everything. But in 1978, China launched a program of economic reform that opened a door to the world. Young workers seen in the documentary came out from their small villages—for the first time in generations—to work in factories, were given free room and board, and sent their wages home

“I think it’s time for us to learn something from other cultures in order to better ourselves.”

I encourage my students to try to understand the difference between the Chinese and Western perspectives; to stay away from ideology and focus solely on reality and practice. Before 1978, for instance, when China was one of the poorest countries in the world, an individual could consume only three pounds of eggs, five pounds

to help their parents build new houses. There were about 250 million migrant laborers in China (just like those young workers) and their hard work has created China's economic miracle: more than 300 million people were lifted from poverty. Without accepting the Western world view, China has achieved goals that Westerners had long assumed to be uniquely theirs.

Table 1: Different Reactions to the Documentary, *Mardi Gras: Made in China*

TOPIC	AMERICAN STUDENTS' OPINIONS	CHINESE WORKERS' OPINIONS
Factory	One of many sweatshops in China	One of many economic opportunities in China
Environment	Military compound	Nice living arrangement
Salary (\$1.00/hour)	Extremely low	Normal
Workers	They are exploited by capitalists	They are achieving their own goals
Regulations of the Factory	Too tough to be acceptable	Reasonable and Acceptable
Foreign Businesses in China	In violation of human rights	Have created a lot of jobs
Globalization	Resulting in inequity	Resulting in prosperity



Old and New Shanghai, China

From their experience watching *Mardi Gras: Made in China*, students learned three important lessons: first, when the world is changing, no existing ideology can be used as a basis for judging change, reality and practice must be the sole criteria; second, rejecting the influence of ideology is key to globalizing ourselves; third, escaping the assumptions of our own culture is the beginning of opening our minds to other parts of the world.

Fourth Pillar: Integration—Learning from Each Other

Does the study of globalization give us an opportunity to learn from each other? Again, students have been divided in their answers to this question. Some thought we should simply turn away from BRIC's success stories and the best of other cultures. One student wrote, "I realized that the cultures vary so much in the norms and values that we couldn't benefit from each other. What works for other cultures doesn't work

in the culture that we live in." Another one agreed: "I think we are doing just fine and there is no need for us to make any changes in our culture." But others thought we should learn something from BRIC's success. "The movie (*Mardi Gras: Made in China*) definitely showed me how to put what I have learned thus far in class into action. It teaches us to accept the inevitable and take it with pride."

Culture is not a once-and-for-all fact, but an ongoing process that is continuously constructed. A culture both shapes its members and is shaped by its members. Globalization calls into question some of the deep assumptions of the Western worldview—assumptions that heretofore have been beyond question. But BRIC's economic development shows that there is not only one trajectory to modernity, and presents alternatives for Western societies in relation to problems such as social inequality. Individualism may long be a core value of the Western worldview, but several of my students would agree with their classmate who wrote: "There is too much individualism in our culture. I think it's time for us to learn something from other cultures in order to better ourselves." As this comment shows, my students have gone from being unaware of the changing world to preparing themselves very consciously for the new era of globalization.



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