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INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE: BRINGING THE WORLD HOME THROUGH SOCIAL JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT. As the head of my university’s new International Justice program, I am well placed to speak about the trials and tribulations of teaching students about global politics. Our program draws in Sociology, Justice Studies, and Political Science students. The overarching goal is to make students aware of international issues ranging from genocide and terrorism to international migration and global institutions through the lens of social justice. The social justice lens is particularly effective because it provides a reason for exploring global issues. These issues are not bloodlessly described in my courses with the hopes of extracting causal variables. Instead international issues are framed as issues of justice and students grapple with these issues on the grounds of morality and fairness.

Keywords: social justice, activism, community learning, Justice Studies, internationalizing pedagogy

1. Introduction

This paper seeks to show how a social justice focus can engage students who are new to an international curriculum leading to greater global awareness and potentially social action. First the paper explains what International Justice as a course of study entails. Next, it looks at goals of a program focused on global social justice. Finally, learning achievements and techniques from my course, including successes and failures, are covered.

2. What Is International Justice?

International Justice, a new program at Montclair State University, is housed within the Justice Studies major. Justice Studies is a relatively new course of study nationally. It is rooted in the study of Criminal Justice and Criminology, both of which are offshoots of Sociology focusing on the institutions and

agents related to the criminal justice system. Justice Studies tries to broaden the study of justice taking it away from a focus purely on criminals and the legal system, and expanding it to social, cultural, and legal justice issues. Justice Studies, with its focus on social action and non-violence, is closely related to Peace Studies.

The story of the creation of the Justice Studies Association, the nascent professional association for Justice Studies scholars and practitioners, provides good background for what the area of study is about:

It was ... apparent that there were small groups of scholars in the academic fields of anthropology, political science, religious studies, and sociology among other academic disciplines which were grappling with nonviolent, non-state, non-power-economy-based approaches to justice. Moreover, many of the people interested in these issues were not limiting their concerns about justice to criminal or even restorative justice but were in fact extending them to matters within the family, the school, the workplace, and the neighborhood.¹

The overarching mission of International Justice is to lead students to engage in social action globally. This mission is rooted in the inspiration for Montclair State's Justice Studies Department: Arizona State University's Department of Justice and Social Inquiry which is based in ASU's School of Social Transformation. The Arizona State program seeks to reveal "the sources and manifestations of inequality" in the world as "the starting point" for scholarship. These inequalities generally focus on the status of disadvantaged groups whether they be defined by race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or other status. The program then proposes different visions of what a just society might look like to help affect change in local and global communities.²

Another inspiration for the International Justice program is Stanford's Program on Global Justice, which forwards the goal of bridging "the normative, empirical, and policy dimensions of the Center's concerns for democracy, equitable development, and the rule of law." The Stanford program "links philosophical work on justice, fairness, democracy, and legitimacy with empirical research and reflective practice on issues of human rights, global governance, and access to basic resources."³

The Montclair State Justice Studies Department is interdisciplinary by nature. It includes faculty trained in the fields of Anthropology, Sociology, Criminology, Criminal Justice, Law, and Political Science. The goal of the Department is to bring different lenses to bear on various issues of justice including but not limited to environmental, criminal, legal, democratic, and social issues.

It should be noted here that Montclair State is a highly diverse campus that draws students from all walks of life – rich and poor. The main minority groups that take my classes are Latin- and African-Americans. As the second-

largest state university in a diverse state, Montclair State draws from all types of Americans.⁴

The International Justice concentration within our major, which I head, is a unique course of study within the state of New Jersey. The focus of the new course of study is encapsulated in the following blurb from its Program Approval Document:

Prior to September 11th, international justice focused on a wide range of concerns, including the rights and duties of nation states in the global arena, the role of international organizations and agreements, the scope of international responses to transnational wars and past human rights abuses, and the development of new venues for international cooperation. In the wake of the September 11th attacks against the United States, international justice issues have expanded to include conditions of detention, coercive interrogation, the use of military commissions, and broadened power to collect data and engage in international and domestic surveillance.⁵

Whereas International Relations programs focus primarily on states and security, International Justice has courses on issues such as genocide, human rights, international prisoner's rights, human trafficking, terrorism, and global crime.⁶ Transnational issues are a decided focus of this concentration as are issues of global social justice. While International Relations theories are employed in International Justice courses – after all, the field of study is so green that few theoretical models have been constructed for it – I.J. focuses more on working toward a just global normative order and changing the world rather than simply understanding how it works. Theoretical frameworks that focus on normative justice provided by Immanuel Kant, Charles Beitz, Thomas Pogge, Joseph Carens, and John Rawls are employed.⁷

3. Why a Social Justice Focus to Internationalizing the Curriculum?

Fuentes et al. posit that “universities may be the best place to advance democratic, multicultural, and social justice goals for this nation’s students.”⁸ Undergraduate students arrive at universities having just gone through “highly segregated K-12 schools” with the beliefs that “people’s culture best accounts for the problems they experience,” that racism and other forms of discrimination are “problems of the past,” that “assimilation is a valued goal,” and that America is a thriving meritocracy.⁹

These preconceived notions are hard to contradict since they are so ingrained in students via their education in school and in the family. In my personal experience, I have seen a lot of resistance to the theories of fairness proposed by John Rawls by students who feel that Americans “get what they deserve” economically and that the disadvantaged should “fend for them-

selves.” These beliefs are hammered into young people not only in school and at home but via a media industry that highlights Horatio Alger-type rags-to-riches tales. The lesson is that oppressed groups have the tools to change their condition but, for whatever reason, fail to do so.

What do come up are stories where affirmative action and “reverse discrimination” of whites create social injustices. While students of color (or women) rarely feel comfortable supporting affirmative action policies (lest they be seen as “charity cases”), white majority students feel it acceptable to disparage these programs for so-called “reverse racism.”

The goals, then, of a program focusing on social justice are first to create “an atmosphere of compassion” where diversity is appreciated and differences between people and peoples are recognized.¹⁰ As Karen Hawkins writes, there are two core beliefs to teaching on social justice. “The first belief is that there is injustice in the world where some people are consistently and undeservedly privileged while others are consistently and undeservedly disadvantaged. The second belief is that educators can be agents for change and interrupt (or challenge) cycles of oppression of race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, region, and others.”¹¹

These beliefs are in line with the goals of citizenship education proposed by James Banks, University of Washington, Seattle’s Director of the Center for Multicultural Education. Banks argues that due to increased migration and the myriad effects of globalization, it is essential that citizens in all nation-states be taught to appreciate diversity and cultural awareness.¹² Making better citizens, a goal of many political scientists, entails teaching them about social injustices.

But the work doesn’t end there. Fuentes, et al. note that many classes that highlight social suffering raise social awareness while leaving “most students feeling disempowered and disengaged.”¹³ This is why Hawkins notes that both reflection and action are necessary in teaching about social justice. She contends that, “If social justice is only talked about, it is merely rhetoric; and if action is taken without reflection it becomes reactionary.”¹⁴ This is why Fuentes, et al. call for courses that “help students see themselves as actors capable of creating history.”¹⁵

4. Getting Students to Think Globally

My courses in International Justice are, thus, composed to engage students in social awareness first with the hopes of leading to social action. The type of awareness-action model is encapsulated in Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn’s book *Half the Sky* where a painstakingly detailed catalogue of women’s worldwide oppression is followed by chapters on what one can do about these problems.¹⁶

The underlying goal of my courses in International Justice is to create a within-classroom community that is then actively engaged enough to go outside the classroom and exact change. Without making within-class connections, students will feel atomized and anonymous and will not seek out opportunities to change the world. Why change a big, faceless world of which I am just one isolated piece? When the classroom becomes a community, global issues can then be focused upon.

To this end, the course is organized dynamically. The syllabus and course content are flexible and agile – changing to the changing interests of the students. If students are interested in issues in their home countries or of their particular races, opportunities must be presented to them to explore these issues. As Banks writes, “It is not realistic to expect Puerto Rican students in New York City to have a strong allegiance to U.S. national values or deep feelings for dying people in Afghanistan if they feel marginalized and rejected within their community, their school, and their nation-state.”¹⁷ Caring about who the students are as human beings is the only route to getting them to care about others. Projecting the needs of other people onto young people who have their own economic, social and political concerns places an unwelcome burden on the student. Haranguing students about the “bottom billion” or the plight of the global poor is not effective when the student is described as a cookie-cutter Western “rich” person whose personal concerns are attacked as selfish and greedy. The only way to get around these perceptions and reach a state where young people want to help others is to engage students individually and create an internal community for them where their peers are seen as individuals worthy of compassion and respect.

Community-building practices include group work and discussions where students’ personal identities are defined and appreciated. Students are encouraged to look into their personal histories and the histories of their ancestors. They also frequently engage with one another in activities that are low-stress (read: ungraded) and broad. Subjects of social injustice are entered into only after students have become comfortable with one another and the instructor. The first few weeks are spent on theoretical and historical issues that provide background.

Students are frequently asked to voice their own opinions *before* they are exposed to academic works on the subject. This yields two results. First, students become comfortable and confident voicing their opinions in a non-judgmental, non-confrontational environment. Second, the instructor can discover misperceptions and blind-spots of students that he or she may not have anticipated. For example, in discussing Iranian nuclear ambitions before doing reading on the subject, students remarkably thought that America stealing Iran’s nuclear weapons was a viable option and that nuclear war was desirable from America’s standpoint. This led me to instruct students on the horrors of nuclear war and the detrimental environmental, political, and social effects of the use

of even one nuclear weapon on a civilian population. Further, in studying Africa or the Middle East, frequent misperceptions that culture or religion are at the root of these regions' ills has led me to talk about the weakness of cultural explanations and to hold classes on the diversity of African and Middle Eastern cultures.

5. Learning Achievements and Struggles: A Route to Social Action?

As stated above, my International Justice courses are organized by beginning with theoretical and historical background before delving into issues of social injustice such as the plight of the global poor, genocide, issues of migration and refugee status, human trafficking, the problem of failed states to both the global citizens and to their own inhabitants, and issues arising from both democratic and non-democratic governments engaging in racism, xenophobia, and other discrimination. These issues are first introduced before solutions are proffered. Institutions such as the United Nations (and its numerous humanitarian bodies) that might help solve these problems are also discussed as are proposals for a stronger, more democratic world government.

The two lessons that seem to hit home the hardest are those about the genocide in Rwanda and about global poverty. The shock that many students feel when they see the Frontline documentary *Ghosts of Rwanda* is palpable. Few are capable of imagining how Rwanda and how genocide looks. While in the abstract it is easy for some to dismiss the plight of those in a little-known country, seeing human beings hacked to death by their neighbors brings out students' compassion and anger. Many told me after the course that the movie on the genocide in Rwanda angers them still. Many also see the problem of racism in the world first-hand in the inaction of the global community to stop the horrible tragedy there – while mostly white expatriates were shuttled back to their home states. I, then, shift the focus to ongoing genocides where aid is necessary so that students can direct their attention and passion to something that is still changeable.

My class spends a few weeks talking about global poverty. Students rank themselves on the Global Rich List and are surprised to see that even poor college students rank among the richest people in the world. We view a film on bonded laborers in India. We then discuss what might be done to help these people. I try to push students to donate to worthy organizations and many say that the only reason they haven't done so already is because they were completely unaware of the scope of the problem. In one class, students argued that global poverty awareness is necessary to help solve the problem because while issues like the plight of abused animals are frequently advertised on television, the plight of the poor and how to help them has become a niche issue focused on by Christian groups that do not appeal to secular young

people. Students argued that more advertising for non-profits that aid the global poor needs to be done particularly on major television networks.

While I have found success with some issues, with others preexisting views have been harder to change and my efforts need to be directed differently or redoubled to affect social change in these realms. Migration is a touchy subject for many Americans. Especially in a class with a sizeable Latin population, migration issues become hard to talk about and conservative views that “we should keep them out” end up underground. That is, conservative students sit tight-lipped during immigration discussions – even sometimes when the issues are phrased normatively – but then write papers that are strongly anti-immigrant.

Jingoistic views sometimes also come up when terrorism is discussed as many see the Middle East as a region where war is interminable and endemic. Islam is also viewed by some as a religion that is violent, extremely conservative, and rigid. These views come from ignorance, but they are also at least implicit in the statements of many political leaders as well as media sources. Getting students to give lip service to diversity and acceptance of migrants and Muslims is one thing, but getting them to change long-held beliefs is another particularly when they feel that the goal of liberal universities is to brainwash them to adhere to the entirety of the Democratic Party platform. The best I have been able to do so far is to try to include all views in my courses, to be non-judgmental to students who may be against social action in some cases, and to try to convince and discuss as equals rather than to berate and lecture. Not everyone will have the same view in the end and that is fine. Awareness is a minimum goal, action a more desired one.

Finally, students many times feel that these “big issues” cannot be changed. I recall one student saying that global inequalities were “not unfair” because “that’s just the way it is.” When I pressed her on the subject, she was able to better explain herself: it wasn’t that the world was a bastion of social justice and equality but rather that “there’s nothing we can do about it.” Changing this idea that “it is what it is” and that students cannot affect change is at the root of International Justice’s mission. By creating communities, raising awareness, and discussing how change can be enacted, International Justice seeks to bring global issues home. Asylum seekers are detained in immigration jails in Elizabeth, New Jersey, a donor organization called New Eyes for the Needy based in Short Hills, New Jersey accepts used eyeglasses that it then sends off to poor people in developing countries, and human trafficking hubs exist in Newark and Atlantic City (Risberg 2011). Global issues are closer than young people think and changing the world needn’t mean donating millions of dollars. Getting students interested in global issues takes building community, raising awareness, and pushing for social action.

NOTES

1. Justice Studies Association web site, "JSA History," <http://www.justicestudies.org/Justice-About-History.htm>, accessed 1 February 2012.
2. Arizona State University Department of Justice and Social Inquiry web site, "About Us," <http://justice.clas.asu.edu/about>, accessed 6 February 2012.
3. Stanford University Program on Global Justice, "About the Program on Global Justice," http://globaljustice.stanford.edu/docs/about_pgj/, accessed 3 February 2012.
4. The university, like many others, claims to rank highly on diversity scores but I do not precisely understand how one ranks "diversity" so suffice it say that Montclair State has a diverse campus.
5. Montclair State University Program Approval Document for International Justice concentration, passed 11 May 2010.
6. Certainly there is some overlap with International Relations but the social justice thrust of the program is different.
7. See Rawls, John, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Carens, Joseph H., "The Rights of Immigrants" in *Group Rights*, edited by Judith Baker (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Pogge, Thomas, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002); Ignatieff, Michael, *Human Rights: As Politics and Idolatry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); O'Neill, Onora, *Bounds of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Beitz, Charles, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); Kant, Immanuel, "Perpetual Peace," <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kant/kant1.htm>.
8. Fuentes, Rey, Lara Chanthongthip and Francisco Rios, "Teaching and Learning Social Justice as an 'Intellectual Community' Requirement: Pedagogical Opportunities and Student Understandings," *Equity and Excellence in Education* 43:3 (2010): 357.
9. Fuentes, et al., "Teaching and Learning Social Justice," 358–9.
10. Hawkins, Karen, "Teaching for Social Justice: A Pedagogy for Twenty-First Century Early Childhood Education," paper presented at 2009 Australian Association for Research in Education International Education Research Conference in Canberra, retrieved from <http://www.aare.edu.au/09pap/haw091467.pdf> on 7 February 2012, 2, 4.
11. Hawkins, "Teaching for Social Justice," 4.
12. Banks, James A., "Teaching for Social Justice, Diversity, and Citizenship in a Global World," *The Educational Forum* 68 (Summer 2004), 289.
13. Fuentes, et al., "Teaching and Learning Social Justice," 359; Glennon, Fred. "Experiential Learning and Social Justice Action: An Experiment in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 7(1) (2004): 30–37; Reason, Robert, Tara Scales, and Elizabeth Roosa Millar, "Encouraging the Development of Racial Justice Allies," *New Directions for Student Services* 110 (2005) : 55–66.
14. Hawkins, "Teaching for Social Justice," 5.
15. Fuentes, et al., "Teaching and Learning Social Justice," 360.
16. Kristof, Nicholas D., and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009).
17. Banks, "Teaching for Social Justice, Diversity, and Citizenship in a Global World," 297.

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