



Global Horizons: The Promise of a Global Education

In July of 2012, Montgomery College, a three-campus institution in Maryland, was awarded the highest grant amount of six community colleges nationally, to carry out the mission of the National Endowment for the Humanities “Bridging Cultures” grant initiative for two-year colleges. This grant supports projects that bring global perspectives to the study and teaching of the humanities. We are fortunate to have this level of federal support to enhance what has long been a labor of love at Montgomery College: bringing the world into the classroom. Many past efforts were short-lived not because of lack of initiative on our part but because pressures on the college’s operating budget reduced the amount of funding available for such international programming.

Our experience with this grant process so far tells us that we have hit on a highly effective way to create an outstanding proposal. Credit for this effective approach goes to Dr. Amy Gumaer, Manager of Grants and Sponsored Programs at Montgomery College, who took a most proactive approach to creating the proposal. An interdisciplinary group of faculty and staff with expertise in the relevant areas of the grant was convened during the course of one semester. At these meetings, assigned tasks for developing different areas of the proposal were brainstormed, and much time was spent in conversation about our project. The entire group read drafts of the proposal and provided feedback. Not surprisingly, the feedback we got from NEH was that the resulting grant proposal was carefully thought out, detailed, and reflective of teaching expertise.

The sustained work on the grant proposal yielded a multi-faceted program we now call The Global Humanities Institute (GHI). What will the GHI accomplish with the support of this grant? We are grateful to have a budget that will carry us through the next five years—enough time to meet our programmatic goals and the NEH’s directive that we create an endowment that will ensure the GHI remains a permanent fixture at the college. We know this grant will have a major impact on faculty expertise and on the way we teach humanities courses. We can also say with certainty that it will have a lasting impact on the college culture, embedding in it a deep awareness and engagement of global issues. Finally, by the end of these six years, we will have accomplished the following goals:

1. Create a new, interdisciplinary foundational course featuring “Global Humanities.”
2. Create six new learning communities organized around global humanities themes.

3. Train approximately 30 faculty through fellowships that focus on syllabus revision and enhanced content knowledge.
4. Create relevant service learning options for faculty teaching global humanities courses who wish to incorporate this high-impact learning practice into their classes.
5. Bring expert speakers and cultural events to our campuses.
6. Establish a strong virtual presence offering a rich assortment of information, including links to model curricula and digital library resources.
7. Travel to China, India, and El Salvador for cultural immersion and scholarly discussions on the humanities with faculty at colleges and universities there.
8. Create new courses in Hindi and provide pre-travel language training.
9. Provide cultural training for travelers as well as pre- and post-travel assessments.

We aim to accomplish these goals primarily through a workgroup comprised of faculty and staff who were on the original proposal-planning team. As we move forward (we are in the planning year now), we are learning that implementation has made necessary the kinds of discussions we should be having routinely. These include conversations about our student population (at MC, they represent over 120 nations), our faculty, our curriculum, our relationship to our international community of learners, and our relationship to humanities scholarship as it has evolved in the last 20 years.

Global Studies has been an area of incredible growth for many years now, and it promises to continue to grow in the future. Therefore, we know that once our students take courses that allow them to specialize in interdisciplinary global studies, they will easily transfer into comparable programs nationwide. However, along with such certainty comes several questions that cause us to pause and reflect because we lack the concrete and transferable experience. For example, we will need to explore institutions that we can partner with abroad, although the nature of those partnerships will be unlike any others we have had thus far. What kinds of partnerships will offer the best opportunities? Also, what are some good strategies for initiating relationships with academic institutions in places as different from us as China? What might a cross-national scholarly dialogue on literature, religion, ethics and the arts look like in an environment where cultural practices exist in contexts that are radically different from ours? How can we ensure that these exchanges benefit our institutions and our students directly enough?

By far, a pressing question for us has been how to make travel learning experiences truly possible for our students. There is no easy answer to this question. We are well aware, as are many other colleges seeking to expand these opportunities, of the challenges in making this kind of study truly accessible. We would like to make travel study possible not only for high-achieving students but also for the mainstream student population—dare we hope for inclusion of the developmental student population? The “Bridging Cultures” challenge grant does not fund student travel, and so that aspect of our work becomes its own parallel (and potentially unfunded) project. We are certain that all work on The Global Humanities Institute will yield results that are timely and necessary, just as we are sure that this project demands a new kind of creative and collaborative approach. As the philosopher

Martha Nussbaum points out in her excellent book, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, “Citizens cannot relate well to the complex world by factual knowledge and logic alone...,” and this, ultimately, is the gap in understanding that the humanities fill.

We have had extensive conversations both within and beyond the college and recognize the need for collaboration and partnerships. We have secured the assistance of an external advisory board comprised of national experts in the field of global humanities studies and research. We have also created an internal advisory board comprised of faculty, staff, and administrators, and we are now in the process of creating an extensive list of Affiliated Faculty. Implementing a program as comprehensive and diverse as this means calling on the knowledge base of our neighbors, our colleagues here and overseas, and our in-house talent. The Global Humanities Institute will have to be creative about reigniting the spark for scholarship among our talented faculty who have given their full attention to teaching for a very long time—faculty, who, with a heavy load of teaching and service, are many times forced to neglect their own intellectual pursuits.

Conclusion

In February 2012, President Obama requested of Congress nearly \$150 million dollars to fund the work of the National Endowment for the Humanities, including nine million dollars for the “Bridging Cultures” initiative. The president’s support of the humanities and the study of other cultures attest to his commitment to prepare Americans for a global workplace. At the community college level, preparing students for a meaningful and productive life is always a top priority—preparing them to be citizens of the world may be our new and welcomed mandate. Montgomery College shares this commitment.

Rita Kranidis, *Professor and Director, Global Humanities Institute*

For further information, contact the author at Montgomery College, 7600 Takoma Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912. Email: rita.kranidis@montgomerycollege.edu