

The Global Voices: Is U.S. Higher Education Listening?

Howard A. Berry

Reprinted with permission from Transitions Abroad

The voice of the French poet Paul Valery: “The future is no longer what it used to be.”

The voice of a service learner in Mexico: “It is one thing to study abroad and see the sights. It is quite another thing to go beyond visiting tourist status and collaborate within a community.”

The voice of a leading educator: “Students are looking for a way to be present at their own education.”

These voices can help us develop an educational strategy for a profoundly changed world.

A recent publication, *Empire* (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Harvard Univ. Press), offers an important conceptual basis for understanding why and how the world changed well before the events of September 2001. It also suggests the need for a profound rethinking of higher education and its role in this changed world and future. The issue is globalism.

Globalism should not be confused with internationalism. Globalism is both trans-national and supra-national. It bypasses or flows through porous national borders. The concepts of sovereignty, monoculture, and the nation-state are bypassed.

The New Reality

The catalyst for this change was the Cold War. With the end of that bipolar competition there were no major obstacles to a global world. All that was needed was the technology to allow it to happen. That technology appeared, virtually coincidentally, as electronic communication and the Internet.

The Change: The first wave of globalism has been economic. Corporate decisions now bypass governments, and business fosters the

spread of global consumer culture. There are three major results of this:

- One is the complexity of what now occurs through the intersection of globalism, nationalism, and culture. The mass migrations of peoples are one major manifestation of this. No longer are there self-contained nations with self-contained cultures. There are very real implications in this for traditional study abroad, intercultural studies, and education in general.
- A second is the economic division of the world. The immense wealth of economic globalism accrues to a comparatively narrow stratum of world society. The result is that most have not participated in this wealth, and the gap between “haves” and “have nots” has been steadily widening within nations and globally.
- A third and crucial result has been the emergence of parallel global movements. As the authors of *Empire* point out, once the advantages of trans- or extra-national pathways are pioneered they can be imitated by other and even darker groups: organized crime, the drug trade, and, as we have recently experienced, terrorism.

The Missing Voices: But a voice is missing as these global structures pursue their economic, political, and cultural ends: the voice of those who are not participating in the global prosperity and yet are buffeted by the global economic, political, and cultural global winds. Who speaks for and works with them, opening to them at least a share of the global world and training the leaders who can help them?

The Call to Higher Education: Actually, there already exists an institution capable of assuming this role, perhaps the only one. It has bases in virtually every nation. In the main, these bases share a common goal, purpose, and mission. They have reputation and respect. They are in a strategic position to share the thinking and values of future leaders. They are colleges and universities of higher education.

A Call to Higher Education

Is there any content to the many university mission statements claiming to educate the total student and to prepare them for the world they will enter? Of course some universities have not stood aside completely from globalism. But their rush to membership in global society

has been mainly to the economic sector: business internships, MBAs, university/business research affiliations. But what of education for the other realities of globalism?

Can higher education really stand aside from the social and human dimensions of what is happening? Is it possible that it has an obligation, perhaps a mandate, to reconsider deeply what it means to be a fully educated person in a global world? To do so calls for serious and perhaps painful rethinking of the goals and purposes of higher education in a drastically changed world: thinking about ways for higher education to acquire a global voice.

Universities around the world are filled with young people eager to be challenged, impatient to experience the world directly, seeking a way to prove to themselves, and to others, their worth and value. Equally, the world is filled with the needy, those needing help and caring and skills. Is there a way to bring the human resource of university students and human need together? Is there a way to bring higher education into the broader and moral dimensions of the global world?

Response of Service-Learning

Some have seen the way to this connection through service-learning. Through the experience of volunteer service, students go beyond simplistic notions of culture to encounter multidimensional levels of society and the human condition. When linked to intentional and coherent learning, the value of the experience becomes exponential. The service is informed by learning, and the learning acquires depth far beyond the classroom. Students begin to hear the voices previously unheard, the many voices of the culture. They are forced to examine the complexities of social, economic, political, and moral issues and their causes. They move from facts to information, from information to knowledge, and, in at least some cases, from knowledge to wisdom.

International Partnership students, for example, do not just go into another culture, they enter into it, become part of it. They go beyond academic tourism.

But the International Partnership is not alone. As a survey it conducted for the Ford Foundation revealed, colleges and universities around the world are engaging in service-learning as a way of addressing educa-

tional reform, redefining their mission, and connecting themselves, their faculty, and their students to the world community. But this is not enough. The survey also revealed that these efforts are fragmented, lacking coherence, and that institutions are not communicating, often unaware of each other's work

Educational Globalism

Why should we care about all of this? For many reasons, but most immediately because in the global world there is no longer an "inside" and an "outside." The ecology of globalism means that what affects one part ripples through the totality.

Will the creation of global educational ecology through service learning eliminate all ills? No, there is no such panacea. But it can make a difference, and that—after all—is what education is about. It can help generations of young people to be present at their own education. It can develop in them humane leadership. And in so doing it can bring them as leaders to hear and respond to the voices of the unheard.